

Earth, the Maurader, by Arthur Josephus Burks

2023 Editor's note:

I have added different symbols to differentiate between the secret hand code, [in brackets], and telepathic communication, in ::double colons::, to help show the differences between different communication types since it's important to the plot.

In some areas it's not clear whether the characters are speaking aloud, telepathically, or with the secret hand code, so any parts left unclear are left in normal "quotation marks". There may also be sections where it's obvious but I forgot to mark them.

Foreword

Despite the fact that for centuries the Secret of Life had been the possession of children of men, the Earth was dying. She was dying because the warmth of the sun was fading; because, with the obliteration of the oceans in order to find new land upon which men might live, her seasons had become stormy, unbearably cold and dreary: and the very fact of her knowledge of the Secret of Life, in which men numbered their ages by centuries instead of by years, was her undoing.

For when men did not die, they multiplied beyond all counting, beyond all possibility of securing permanent abiding places. One man, in the days when the earth was young, and man lived at best to the age of three score years and ten, could have, given time and opportunity, populated a nation. Now, when men lived for centuries, eternally youthful, their living descendants ran into incalculable numbers.

The earth—strange paradox—was dying because it

had learned the Secret of Life. Twenty centuries before, the last war of aggression had been fought, in order that an over-populated nation might find room in which to live. Now all the earth was one nation, speaking one tongue—and there were no more lands to conquer.

Chapter 1: Sarka

In his laboratory atop the highest peak in the venerable Himalayas, lived Sarka, conceded by the world to be its greatest scientist, despite his youth. His grandfather, who had watched the passing of eighteen centuries, had discovered the Secret of Life and thoughtlessly, in the light of later developments, broadcast his discovery to the world. The genius of this man, who was also called Sarka, had been passed on to his son, Sarka the Second, and by him in even greater degree to Sarka the Third ... called merely Sarka for the purposes of this history.

Had Sarka lived in the days before the discovery of the Secret of Life, people of that day would have judged him a young man of twenty. His real age was four centuries.

Behind him as he sat moodily staring at the gigantic Revolving Beryl stood a woman of most striking appearance. Her name was Jaska, and according to ideas of the Days Before the Discovery, she seemed a trifle younger than Sarka. Her hand, unadorned by

jewelry of any kind, rested on Sarka's shoulder as he studied the Revolving Beryl, while her eyes, whose lashes, matching her raven hair, were like the wings of tiny blackbirds, noted afresh the wonder of this man.

"What is to be done?" she asked him at last, and her voice was like music there in the room where science performed its miracles for Sarka.

Wearily Sarka turned to face her, and she was struck anew, as she had been down the years since she had known this man, every time their glances met, at the mighty curve of his brow, which rendered insignificant his mouth, his delicate nose of the twitching nostrils, the well-deep eyes of him.

"Something must be done," he said gloomily, "and that soon! For, unless the children of men are provided with some manner of territorial expansion, they will destroy one another, only the strongest will survive, and we shall return to the days when the waters covered the earth, and monstrous creatures bellowed from the primeval slime!"

"You are working on something?" she asked softly.

For a moment he did not answer. While she waited, Jaska peered into the depths of the Revolving Beryl, which represented the earth. It was fifty feet in diameter, and in its curved surface and entrancing depths was mirrored, in this latest development of televue, all the earth and the doings of its people. But Jaska scarcely saw the fleeting images, the men locked in conflict for the right to live, the screaming, terror-stricken women. This was now a century-old story, and the civilization of Earth had almost reached the breaking point.

No, she scarcely saw the things in the Beryl, for she had read the hint of a vast, awesome secret in the eyes of Sarka—and wondered if he dared even tell her.

"If the people knew," he whispered, "they would do one of two things! They would tear me limb from limb, and hurl the parts of me outward into space forever—or they would demand that I move before I am ready—and cause a catastrophe which could

never be rectified; and this grand old Earth of ours would be dead, indeed!"

[And this secret of yours?] Jaska now spoke in the sign language which only these two knew, for there were billions of other Revolving Beryls in the world, and words could be heard by universal radio by any who cared to listen. And always, they knew, the legions of enemies of Sarka kept their ears open for words of Sarka which could be twisted around to his undoing.

[I should not tell even you,] he answered, his fingers working swiftly in their secret, silent language, which all the world could see, but which only these two understood. [For if my enemies knew that you possessed the information, there is nothing they would stop at to make you tell.]

"But I would not tell, Sarka," she said softly. "You know that!"

He patted her hands, and the ghost of a smile touched his lips.

"No," he said, "you would not tell. Some day soon—and it must be soon if the children of men are not to destroy themselves, I will tell you! It is a secret that lies heavily on my heart. If I should make a mistake.... Chaos! Catastrophe! Eternal, perpetual dark, the children of men reduced to nothingness!"

A little gasp from Jaska, for it was plain that this thing Sarka hinted at was far and away beyond anything he had hitherto done—and Sarka had already performed miracles beyond any that had ever been done by his predecessors.

"When my grandfather," went on Sarka moodily, "perfected, in this self-same laboratory, the machinery by which the waters of the oceans could be disintegrated, our enemies called him mad, and fought their way up these mountain slopes to destroy him! With the pack at his doors, he did as he had told them he would do. Though they hurried swiftly into the great valleys to colonize them—where oceans had been—they were like ravening beasts, and gave my grandfather no thanks. Our people have always fought against progress, have always been

disparaging of its advocates! When the first Sarka discovered the Secret they would have destroyed him, though he made them immortal...."

"If only the Secret," interrupted Jaska, "could be returned to him who discovered it! That would solve our problem, for men then would die and be buried, leaving their places for others."

Again that weary smile on the face of Sarka.

"Take back the Secret which is known to-day to every son and daughter of woman? Impossible! More nearly impossible than the attainment of my most ambitious dream!"

[And that dream?] spoke Jaska with speeding fingers.

"I have wondered about you," said Sarka softly, while those eyes of his bored deeply into hers. "We have been the best of friends, the best of comrades; but there are times when it comes to me that I do not know you entirely! And I have many enemies!"

"You mean," gasped the woman, for the moment forgetting the secret sign manual, "you think it possible that I—I—might be one of your enemies, in secret?"

"Jaska, I do not know; but in this matter in my mind I trust no one. I am afraid even that people will read my very thoughts, though I have learned to so concentrate upon them that not the slightest hint of them shall go forth telepathically to my enemies! I do not mind death for myself; but our people must be saved! It is hideous to think that we have been given the Secret of Life, only to perish in the end because of it! I am sorry, Jaska, but I can tell no one!"

But Jaska, one of the most beautiful and intelligent of Earth's beautiful and intelligent women, seemed not to be listening to Sarka at all, and when he had finished, she shrugged her shoulders slightly and prepared to leave.

He followed her to the nearest Exit Dome, built solidly into the side of his laboratory, and watched her as she slipped swiftly into the white, skin-tight clothing—

marked on breast and back with the Red Lily of the House of Cleric. His eyes still were deeply moody.

He helped her don the gleaming metal helmet in whose skull-pan was set the Anti-Gravitational Ovoid—invented by Sarka the Second, used now of necessity by every human creature—and strode with her to the Outer Exit, a door of ponderous metal sufficiently strong to prevent the inner warmth of the laboratory getting out, or the biting cold of the heights to enter, and studied her still as she buckled about her hips her own personal Sarka-Belt, which automatically encased her, through contact with her tight clothing, with the warmth and balanced pressure of the laboratory, which would remain constant as long as she wore it.

With a nod and a brief smile, she stepped to the metal door and vanished through it. Sarka turned gloomily back to his laboratory. Looking into the depths of the Revolving Beryl and adjusting the enlarging device which brought back, life size, the infinitesimal individuals mirrored in the Beryl, he watched her go—a trim white figure which flashed across the void,

from mountain-top to her valley home, like a very white projectile from another world. Very white, and very precious, but....

When she was home, and had waved to him that she had arrived safely, he forgot her for a time, and allowed his eyes to study the inner workings of this vast, crowded world whose on-rushing fate was so filling his brain with doubt, with fear—and something of horror!

Chapter 2: The People of the Hives

Moodily Sarka stared into the depths of the Beryl, which represented the Earth, and in which he could see everything that earthlings did, after visually enlarging them, through use of a microscope that could be adjusted, with relation to the Beryl, to bring out in detail any section of the world he wished to study. His face was utterly sad. The people at last truly possessed the Earth—all of it that was, even with the aid of every miracle known to science, habitable.

The surface of the Earth was one vast building, like a hive, and to each human being was allotted by law a certain abiding place. But men no longer died, unless they desired to do so, and then only when the Spokesmen of the Gens saw fit to grant permission; and there soon would be no place for the newborn to live. Even now that point had practically been reached throughout the world, and in the greater portion it *had* been reached, and passed, and men knew that while men did not die, they could be killed!

The vast building, towering above what had once been the surface of the earth, to heights undreamed of before the discovery, was irregular on its top, to fit the contour of the earth, and its roof, constructed of materials raped from the earth's core, was so designed as to catch and concentrate the yearly more feeble rays of the sun, so that its life-giving warmth might continue to be the boon of living people.

It had been found as Earth cooled that life was possible to a depth of eight miles below the one-time surface, so that the one huge building extended below the surface to this great depth, and was divided and re-divided to make homes for men, their wives, and their progeny. But even so, space was limited. Neighboring families outgrew their surroundings, overflowed into the habitations of their neighbors—and every family was at constant war against its neighbors.

Men did not die, but they could be slain, and there was scarcely a home, above or below, in all the vast building, which had not planned and executed murder, times and times—or which had not left its

own blood in the dwelling places of neighbors.

No law could cope with this intolerable situation, for men, down the ages, had changed in their essential characteristics but little—and recognized one law only in their extremity, that of self-preservation.

So there was murder rampant, and mothers who wept for children, husbands, fathers or mothers, who would never return to their homes.

"My grandfather," whispered Sarka, his eyes peering deeply into a certain area beyond that assigned by law to the House of Cleric, where men of two neighboring families were locked in mortal, silent conflict, "should not have frustrated the mad scheme of Dalis! It was slaughter, wholesale and terrible, but it would have cleansed the souls of the survivors!"

Mentally Sarka was looking back now to that red day when Dalis, the closest scientific rival of Sarka the First, had come to Sarka the First with his proposal which at the time had seemed so hideous. Sarka remembered that interval in all its details, for he had

heard it many times.

"Sarka," Dalis had said in his high-pitched voice, staring at Sarka the First out of red-rimmed, fiery eyes, "unless something is done the world will rush on to self-destruction! Men will slay one another! Fathers will kill their sons, and sons their fathers, if something is not done! For always there is marrying and giving in marriage, and each family is reaching out in all directions, seeking merely space in which to live. Formerly there were wars which automatically took thought of the overplus of men; but to-day the world is at peace, as men regard the term—and every man's hand is against his neighbor! There will be no more wars, when there should be! There is but one alternative!"

"And that?" Sarka the First had queried suspiciously.

"The segregation of the fittest! The destruction, swiftly, painlessly, of all the others! And when the survivors have again re-populated the earth to overflowing—a repetition of the same corrective! Men will die, yes, by millions; but those who are left will be

a stronger, sturdier race, and by this process of elimination, century by century, men will evolve and become super-men!"

"And this plan of yours?"

For a moment Dalis had paused, breathing heavily, as though almost afraid to continue. Then, while Sarka the First had listened in frozen terror, Dalis had explained his ghastly scheme.

"If it were not for the mountains and the valleys," said Dalis, "and the world were perfectly round and smooth of surface, that surface would be covered by water to the depth of one mile! Is that not correct! The Earth, rotating on its axis, travels about the sun at the rate of something like nineteen miles per second, so perfectly balanced that the oceans remain almost quiescent in their beds! But, Sarka, mark me well! If we could, together, devise a way to halt this rotation for as much as a few seconds, what would happen?"

"What would happen?" repeated Sarka the First,

dropping his own voice to a husky, frightened whisper. "Why, the oceans would be hurled out of their beds, and a wall of water a mile high or more—it is all guesswork!—would rush eastward around the world, bearing everything before it! It would uproot and destroy buildings, sweep the rocky covering of the earth free of soil; and humanity, caught on the earth below the highest level of the world's greatest tidal wave, would be engulfed!"

"Exactly!" Dalis had said with a grin. "Exactly! Only—the people we wish to survive could be warned, and these could either be aloft when the tidal wave swept the face of the earth, or could be safely out of reach of the waters on the sides of the highest mountains!"

Sarka the First, wanly smiling, catching his breath at last, now that he realized the utter impossibility of this mad scheme, had been minded to humor the fancies of a man whom he had believed not quite sane.

"Why not," he began, "take away from men the Secret of Life, so that they will die, as formerly, when the

world was young?"

"When all the world knows the Secret, when even children learn it before they are capable of walking?" demanded Dalis sarcastically. "You could only remove knowledge of the Secret from the brains of men by removing those brains themselves! Your thought is more terrible even than mine, because it leads to this inescapable conclusion!"

"But supposing for a moment your mad scheme were possible, who should say whom, of all the earth's people, should be saved, whom sacrificed?"

"What better test could be given than that which I am proposing?" Dalis had snarled. "Those worthy of being saved would save themselves! Those who would perish would not be worth saving! As natural, as inescapable as the law of the survival of the fittest, which has been an axiom of life since men first crawled out of the slime and asked each other questions as they caught their first glimpses of the stars and pondered the reasons for them!"

"But where, then, was there any point in my giving to people the Secret of Life?"

"Had you paused to think," snapped Dalis, "you would never have done so! Your lust for power, and for fame, destroyed your foresight!"

"And is it not, Dalis," replied Sarka the First, softly, "for this, really, that you have come to me? To berate me? To throw at my head mad schemes impossible of accomplishment? I have always known you for an enemy, Dalis, because you are envious of what I have accomplished, what you sense that I will accomplish as time passes!"

"I do not love you, Sarka!" retorted Dalis frankly. "I despise you! Hate you! But I need the aid of that keen brain of yours! You see, hate you though I may, I do you honor still. I have something up here," tapping the dome of his brow, only less lofty than that of Sarka, "which you lack. You have something I have not, never can attain! But together we are complements, each of the other, and to the two of us this scheme is possible!"

"I am very busy, Dalis," Sarka the First had replied coldly. "I must ask you to leave me! What you propose is impossible, unthinkable!"

"So," retorted Dalis, "you think me mad? You think me incapable of perfecting this plan about whose details you have not even yet been informed! You would show me the door as though you were a king and I a slave—when kings and slaves vanished from the earth millenniums ago! Then listen to me, Sarka! I know how to do this thing about which I have told you. I can halt, for a brief moment only, the whirl of the earth about its axis. And by so doing I can flood the earth with the waters of the oceans! If you will not listen to me, I shall do it myself! You shall have two days in which to give me an answer, for I admit that I need you, who would balance me, make sure I made no fatal mistakes! But if you do not, I will act ... along the lines I have hinted!"

Apparently as unconcerned as though he had not just listened to a scheme for almost total depopulation of the world, the destruction of millions upon millions of lives, Sarka the First had dismissed Dalis—who had

straightway used all his offices to arouse the world of science against the first Sarka.

But, when the two days of grace given by Dalis had passed, there were no oceans—for Sarka the First had been planning for a century against the time when the earth must of necessity be over-populated, and had worked and slaved in his laboratory against the contingency which had developed.

He had smiled, though there was a trace of fear on his face after Dalis had left, for *his* scheme had been worked out—not to destroy, but to save!

And from this same laboratory in which Sarka now sat and pondered on the next step in man's expansion, Sarka the First had, in fear and trembling at first, but with his confidence growing by leaps and bounds, worked his own miracle. Untold millions and billions of rays, whose any portion of which, coming in contact with water, immediately separated its hydrogen and oxygen, thus disintegrating its molecules, were hurled forth from their store-houses beneath the laboratory, across the faces of the mighty

oceans of Earth....

And when men saw the miracle, they rushed into the mighty valleys where the oceans had been, and began to build new homes!

That had been centuries ago—scores of centuries.

Now all the earth, all the livable part of the earth, above its surface—and below it to the depths of miles—was filled with people, like bees in a monster hive, like ants of antiquity in their warren hills. And there was no place now that they could go.

So they fought among themselves for the right to live.

"But my grandfather was right!" Sarka almost screamed it, speaking aloud in the silence of his laboratory. "My grandfather was right! Dalis was wrong! Science should be the science of Life, not of Death! Yet whither shall we go! Where now shall we find places for our people who are daily being born in myriads, to live, and love and flourish?"

But there was no answer. Only the humming of the perpetually revolving Beryl, which showed to the sad eyes of Sarka that the people of his beloved earth were rushing onward to Chaos, unless....

"If only I could be sure about Jaska!" he moaned. "If only my courage were as great as that of which I stand in need! For if I fail, even Dalis, had he succeeded with that scheme of his in grandfather's time, would be less a monster, less a criminal!"

Chapter 3: *The Spokesmen of the Gens*

For a long moment Sarka looked broodingly out across the world beyond the metalized glass which formed the curving dome of his laboratory roof. There was little that could be seen, for always the mighty, cold winds, ruffed with flurries of snow and particles of ice, swept over this artificial roof of the world. Here and there huge portions of the area within the range of his normal vision were swept clear and clean of snow and ice—and looked bluely, bitterly cold and hostile.

Without the Sarka-Belts, people who ventured forth from their hives would instantly freeze to the consistency of marble in those winds and storms. For the people of Earth had built their monster habitation toward the stars until they reached up into the altitude of perpetual cold.

Only under that gleaming roof was there warmth. Many of the men, and women, and children who had lost in the now century-old fight for survival had merely been tossed out of the hives. A painless, swift

death—but each death, in a world so highly specialized that each grown person fitted into his niche naturally and easily, was a distinct loss, not much, perhaps, but enough for the loss to be felt.

Sarka, closing his eyes for a moment as though to shut out a horror which in his mind he could visualize, turned back to the Revolving Beryl, in which he kept in constant touch with all parts of the world at will.

"It *must* be done!" he muttered. "I must take action. It means the loss of thousands, perhaps millions of lives, in such a war as the mind of man has not hitherto conceived; but for a Cause greater than any which has ever hitherto been an excuse for armed conflict. But I must discuss it with the Spokesmen of the Gens!"

On the table before Sarka was a row of vari-colored lights, whose source was beneath the floor of the laboratory, out of the heart of the master-mountain, part of the intricate machinery of this laboratory which had been almost twenty centuries in the perfecting. In the dwelling place of each of the

Spokesmen was a single light, colored like one of the lights on Sarka's table. To speak with any one of the Spokesmen Sarka had but to dim the properly colored light by covering it with the palm of his hand. The light in the home of the thus signalled Spokesman was dimmed, and the Spokesman would know that Sarka desired to converse with him.

Sarka noted the blue light, and shuddered. For if he covered it with his palm it would summon Dalis, a great scientist, but an erratic one, as Sarka the First had so clearly shown.

Sarka turned again to the Beryl. The area of which Dalis was Spokesman was, roughly speaking, that part of what had once been the Pacific Ocean, north of a line drawn east and west through the southernmost of the Hawaiian Islands, northward to the Pole. The home of Dalis was in the heart of what had once been an island historians claimed had been called Oahu, now a mountain peak still retaining a hint of the pre-Discovery name: Ohi.

The total number of the Spokesmen, the oldest of

earth's inhabitants, was twelve, and the remainder of the Earth not under the tutelary rule of Dalis was divided up among the other eleven Spokesmen. Cleric, for example, father of Jaska, was Spokesman of that area which men had once called Asia, the vast valleys of the once Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean; while the youngest of the Spokesmen, in a manner serving his apprenticeship, was tutelary head of the vast plateau once called Africa. The name of this man was Gerd.

“He, at least,” thought Sarka, thinking of each Spokesman in turn and cataloguing each in his mind, “will be with me. I wonder about the others, and especially Dalis. He has always hated us!”

Then, with the air of a man who has made up his mind and crosses his particular Rubicon in a single step, Sarka rose to his feet and passed along the row of vari-colored lights, covering each one with his hand in rapid succession.

Then he sat down again, almost holding his breath, and waited. As he stared at the row of lights his eyes

lingered longest on two which were almost golden in color—and his face was very gentle, almost reverent. For those two lights were signals to Sarka the First and Sarka the Second, his grandfather and his father!

It was Dalis, the irascible, the fiery tempered, the erratic, who first made answer.

"Yes! What is it now?"

Sarka smiled a trifle grimly as he spoke a single word.

"Wait!"

The voice of Dalis, which Sarka had good cause to remember, had sounded as loudly in the laboratory as though Dalis had been present there in person, for men had learned to communicate by voice almost without the aid of radio and its appurtenances though the principle upon which the first crude beginnings of radio were fashioned still applied. Each man's dwelling place was both a "sender" and a "receiver," and men could talk and be talked to no matter where they lived—individuals telepathically summoned at

desire of anyone wishing verbal contact.

"Gerd is here!" came the voice of that Spokesman.

To him also Sarka spoke one word.

"Wait!"

"I am here, Sarka!" came a musical voice. "And Jaska is with me, listening!"

That would be Cleric, loyal friend, master scientist, but always shy of contact with people, though swift to anger and self-forgetfulness when he knew himself right and was opposed. Sarka darted a look back at the Revolving Beryl, adjusted swiftly the Beryl-microscope, and smiled into the faces of Jaska and Cleric, who looked enough alike that they might have been brother and sister, though Cleric had been born ten centuries before his daughter Jaska. They smiled back at him.

He shifted the Beryl-microscope and stared for a second at Dalis, there in the Beryl, and marked the

antagonism Dalis was at no pains to hide.

One by one the Spokesmen reported.

Klaser, from the Americas; Durce from the valleys of the vanished Atlantic; Boler from that part of the Artic Circle not included in the wedge which the Gens of Dalis thrust northward to the Pole: Vardee; Prull; Yuta; Aal; Vance and Hime. Each from his appointed area, each from the official headquarters of his Gens, the name given to those people who acknowledged the tutelage of a Spokesman. Each Spokesman, therefore, was the mouthpiece of millions of men, women and children. And over the Spokesmen, and not themselves Spokesmen, were three scientists: The Sarkas, First, Second and Third.

When all twelve of the Spokesmen had reported and been bidden by Sarka to wait, a smile touched the face of Sarka for an instant as two other voices, so nearly alike they might have been the voice of a single person, reported themselves.

"I am here, son! What is it?"

Oddly enough, Sarka's father and grandfather reported with exactly the same words. Sarka smiled at a whimsical thought of his own. It had been some time since the three scientist Sarkas had been together, and despite the vast differences in their ages they might have been triplets!

The reports were in and the Spokesmen were waiting; but for almost a minute Sarka waited still. Then he spoke swiftly those words for which there could be no recall:

"Gentlemen, the time is come when we must go to war!"

For a long moment after he had spoken there was no answer. Then it came, in the jeering laughter of the antagonistic Dalis.

"War? Against whom? The Sarkas are always dreaming!"

"And Dalis," continued Sarka, "shall be one of the leaders of Earthlings in this war which I am about to

propose! You doubtless recall a proposal you once made to Sarka the First? Your proposal to halt for a few moments the headlong whirl of the earth about its axis, thus to flood—"

"Stop!" interrupted Dalis. "Stop! Immediately!"

And Sarka stopped. He had forgotten, in the excitement of his urge to explain his plans, that the millions of people who gave official allegiance to Dalis had never been informed of the hideous proposal he had made, back there centuries ago, as a corrective for a world rapidly approaching over-population. Had his people known, never again would the voice of Dalis be heard in life. The Spokesmen knew, and the Sarkas; but no others. Sarka understood the protest of Dalis; honored it.

"Dalis," he went on, more softly, "after I have explained what I wish to do, you will come to me here, prepared to explain to me exactly how you planned doing what you proposed to my grandfather—for your knowledge will be necessary to me...."

"Isn't it enough that your grandfather stole from me, and amplified, an idea that would have made me forever famous, without his grandson also stealing the fruit of my brains?"

"Your brains," said Sarka sharply, "belong to your people. What I plan is for their betterment. But it means war, war which may last a century, two centuries, in which lives of countless thousands may be lost."

Sarka's last words were almost drowned out by the humming sound that came out of the Revolving Beryl, that perfected device which was the ultimate in the evolution of television and vibration-transference. Sarka's heart sank, for he knew the meaning of that sound. So did the Spokesmen.

"You see?" came the rasping voice of Dalis. "You hear? Look into your Beryl! See the clenched fists of the earth's myriads being shaken at you! Listen to the protests of the millions who hear your every word! See what Earthlings think of the prospect of war!"

For a moment Sarka spoke directly to the people.

"Be silent and listen! It will be war, yes; but not such a skulking, hideous war as ye wage among yourselves for a place to live! You, fathers, are guilty of slaying your sons! You, sons, of slaying your fathers! Merely by thrusting them forth from the hives, into the Outer Cold! This war I propose shall be a war that shall match your manhood, if ye indeed be men! Listen to me, and I will find for you new lands to conquer, new homes for your holding, if ye can take them!"

"But where," interrupted the sarcastic voice of Dalis, "are these new lands of which you speak? Inside the Earth? Already our hives reach into the Earth a distance of eight miles. Where else, then?"

"For shame, Dalis!" snapped Sarka, "and you a scientist! Every bit of habitable land on this globe is some man's dwelling place! Spokesmen of the Gens of Earth, look out your windows! Look out and upward—and read Dalis' answer in the stars!"

For a full minute there was silence throughout the

earth, and Sarka saw that the Spokesmen were doing his bidding. He himself looked out, out through the swirling storm which tore at the crest of the Himalayas, a dark and forbidding Outside, in the starred dome of which rode the pale orb moon!

"It is obvious, son," came the voice of Sarka the First, "what you mean. But how accomplish it?"

"Fifteen centuries ago, my father's father," cried Sarka, "Dalis told you that he possessed the power to halt for a moment the headlong whirl of the world on its axis about the sun! He could do it then—and no man, whatever he may think of Dalis as a man, has ever known him to lie! If, fifteen centuries ago, he could bring the whirling world to pause, why can we not, now...."

And, even though he had thought of this for years upon end, had spoken over and over to himself the words he was now using, rehearsing his proposed argument to the Spokesmen of the Gens, Sarka found himself for a moment almost afraid to continue and speak them.

"I understand, Sarka!" came the excited voice of Gerd, youngest of the Spokesmen. "And I follow wherever you think it best to lead! You mean ... you mean...."

"Exactly!" Sarka managed at last. "If the Earth can be stayed on its axis, it can be diverted from its orbit entirely! I know, for I have found the manner of its doing, though I need the genius of Dalis to check my work and my calculations! We have no new land on this Earth to conquer; but the Universe is filled with countless other worlds! What say ye, Spokesmen of the Gens? What say ye, Gens of Earth?"

But for the time of a thousand heartbeats neither the Spokesmen or the Gens made answer to Sarka, and all the world fell utterly silent, absorbing this unbelievable thing of which Sarka had hinted.

Over the metalized roof of the world the snows and storms, the winds and the wraiths of the long dead moaned and screamed as with an icy voice of abysmal warning.

And for the time of those thousand heartbeats, the world was pausing to listen.

When realization came, the answer would come from the Spokesmen and from the Gens; and here in the Sarka laboratory, his Rubicon crossed at last, sat Sarka, staring through the Beryl-microscope into the depths of the Revolving Beryl. His face was dead white, his eyes narrowed.

The first voice which came startled him.

"It is mad, Sarka! Mad! Mad! But I am with you, always!"

It was the voice of Jaska, daughter of Cleric!

Chapter 4: *The Earthlings Make Ready*

"I too, am with you!" came the voice of Gerd.

"Spoken like a child!" snapped Dalis. "For you are as much a child as this third of the dreaming Sarkas! The scheme is mad, madder even than Jaska intimates! The scheme I once proposed, in which I was cheated by the grandfather of this madman, was times and times more feasible and practicable!"

"Suppose," came the soft voice of Sarka the First, interrupting Dalis, "that you put the matter up to your Gens, O wise and noble Dalis, and see which scheme they would endorse if given the choice in the matter—and were your scheme still possible!"

This quickly silenced the vituperation of Dalis, but in no wise prevented his continuance as a rather loud antagonist of the plan.

"How," he demanded, "can you return the Earth to its orbit, even granting you are able to take this initial step? How keep life on the Earth during its flight on

this rainbow-chasing voyage you propose?"

"All these things have been taken into consideration, O Dalis!" retorted Sarka. "All of my scheme is practicable, as I think you will agree when I have told you its details. What think you of the plan, Klaser? And you, Durce? Boler? Vardee? Prull? Yuta? Aal? Vance? Hime?"

When the Spokesmen had answered, some of them hesitantly, for the people all this time had remained silent—and none of the Spokesmen could be sure how his own Gens would feel in the matter—it developed that seven of the Spokesmen were for the scheme, if it should prove to be possible.

"If this is the voice of the majority of the Gens," snapped Dalis, "given thus by their Spokesmen, then I vote with the majority! I shall call upon you immediately, Sarka, for a conference!"

"I am glad," said Sarka softly, "that the majority of the Spokesmen are with me. Especially am I glad that Dalis and Cleric vote with me. For the others I have

only this to say: I have thought this matter over for almost a century, and I know that the time has come when we must act, to save ourselves from self-destruction. Had you not decided with me, I should have acted alone!"

"Yes?" snapped Dalis. "How?"

"I have, here in my laboratory," replied Sarka, "the power whereby to accomplish the scheme of which I have told you! Had all the Gens defied me, I would have nevertheless sent the Earth outward on its voyage, bringing it within reach of the denizens, first of the Moon, second of Mars—and you people of little courage would have been compelled to fight to save yourselves!"

"You would have forced us into war?" came the quavering voice of Prull, the first Spokesman aside from Dalis to take active part in the discussion. "Then why, if you had the means in the beginning to enforce your will upon us, confer with us at all?"

Sarka thrilled with satisfaction, for this question gave

him the excuse he sought. He had been wondering and scheming how to compel the Spokesmen of the Gens to obey his will.

"I wanted your opinions," he said shortly. "But I also wish you to know that I have the power to go on, whether you wish it or not—*and you must obey me!*"

How would the twelve Gens take this ultimatum of Sarka? For breathless moments after he had spoken he waited, and the Spokesmen with him. Then came the voice of Cleric, addressing his people, yet leaving the contacts open so that Sarka and the other Spokesmen might hear.

"What say you, O Gens of Cleric?" he cried, his voice an exultant, clarioning paeon of rejoicing. "Do we follow this man who promises us life again? Do we follow this man who promises us that once again we shall dwell in plenty, without the blood of relatives and neighbors on our hands? Answer this man, O Gens—for I say unto you that wheresoever he leads I would follow him!"

Silence for a heartbeat. Then a murmuring like the sound of the waves of the long-vanished seas sounded in the laboratory, wherein all things were seen, all sounds were heard. A monster voice, loud and savage, from the Gens of Cleric.

"We follow Cleric wherever he leads!" Finally the words became intelligible. "It matters not to us whom Cleric follows, so long as we may follow Cleric!"

"Well spoken, O Gens of Cleric!" snapped Sarka when the murmuring died down to a whisper, then faded out entirely. "Deck yourselves in the white garments of Cleric! Emblazon upon your backs and breast the Red Lily of his House! Prepare for war! These are your orders; the details I leave to Cleric!"

There came the voice Dalis.

"Give your orders to my Gens direct, O Sarka!" rasped Dalis. "For I leave this very moment to come to you!"

"Thank you," said Sarka, a great wave of exaltation sweeping over him. He had expected Dalis to be the

last and most difficult to manage. Then to the Gens of Dalis, as the blue light on the table in the laboratory showed Sarka that Dalis was already winging toward him: "Deck yourselves in the green garments of Dalis! Wear as your insignia the yellow star of his House, and prepare for war! Make new and modern Ray Directors! Refurbish your rotting machines of destruction! Make ready, and make haste! For the Gens of Dalis will be the first of all the Gens to move in attack against the Dwellers Outside! When the time comes I shall tell you where you shall dwell—if you win the land I shall show you!"

The humming of myriad voices inside the laboratory was now almost continuous, but ever the words of Sarka went out to the Spokesmen and to the Gens, though, save in the case of Cleric and of Dalis, he did not speak to the Gens direct, because he did not wish in one iota to usurp the authority of the Spokesmen themselves.

But when less than an hour had passed, he realized that the first step had been successfully taken, and that from now on the success or failure of the scheme

rested in his own hands. Perspiration bedewed his forehead, and for a second he prayed.

"God of our fathers! Grant that we be not mistaken! Grant that we be right in what we plan! Grant that success attend our arms! Grant that this scheme of mine lead us not to catastrophe—for if this should develop, only I am guilty, and only I should be punished!"

"Amen!"

As one voice, the Spokesmen of the Gens spoke the word, and Sarka heard it. He had forgotten for the moment that the Spokesmen still could hear him.

"That is all," he said huskily. "Prepare your Gens, each of you, for such battle as even our histories never have recorded! For we go against foemen whose strength we do not know, whose manner of life we do not know, and we must not fail! Make haste with your preparations! Your time is short! And Spokesmen, counsel your Gens that they put aside at once all personal differences, all family quarrels, all quarrels

with their neighbors! That each adult individual, each unmarried woman, and such married woman as have all their children grown, and who no longer need them, prepare to go forth to battle! From this laboratory, within a brief space, Dalis and the Sarkas will give you further word!"

Then he dimmed the lights, and severed contact with the Spokesmen of the Gens. Only two lights he did not dim, at the moment, and to two men he spoke softly.

"My father and my father's father! Come to me at once! For there shall be need of the combined genius of the Sarkas if my scheme is to succeed!"

From both Sarkas, as though they had rehearsed the words against this need of them, came answer:

"Aye, son, we come!"

From that moment on until Dalis and the Sarkas were ready to take the most momentous step ever taken in the history of the world, the humming within the laboratory did not cease. For the people, the millions

and billions of people of the hives, were busy, eagerly and feverishly busy, preparing new armament, new engines of destruction, against the time when there should be need of them. And for perhaps the first time in centuries, the people were happy.

For not even the passage of a thousand centuries, or a thousand thousand centuries, could flush from the warm hearts of men the love of conflict!

Sarka smiled wanly, his face very pale. He had spoken, his people were busy with preparations, and now there could be no turning back. The world, when he spoke the word, would rush outward to glorious conflict—or to destruction!

A buzzer sounded near the Exit Dome. Sarka raced to give the "Enter" Signal—and Dalis, he of the hawk-eyes, the sharp nose and sharper tongue, entered the presence of the man who, in a twinkling, had made himself master of the world.

"Well," he said harshly, "I am here! What do you wish of me?"

"We Sarkas," said Sarka easily, "wish to assure ourselves that you will do nothing to obstruct our plans! Dalis, of the Gens of Dalis, you are prisoner of the Sarkas until you have passed your word!"

"That I will never do!" said Dalis calmly. "I have passed my word to go forward with you; but I meant, and you knew I meant, to go forward only as far as to me seemed right and reasonable!"

Chapter 5: *The Betrayal of Dalis*

And until the arrival of the other two Sarkas, Dalis said nothing. His face flushed an angry red as Sarka the First received the "Enter" Signal and stepped into the laboratory which had once been his—which he had delivered into the capable hands of Sarka the Second, in order to find new channels for his genius, as a worker for the betterment of the world's people. This he had found in organization, so that the people worked and labored, despite their personal quarrels, in closer harmony than they ever had before. But now Sarka the Third had called, and the two Sarkas responded. Dalis snarled at his ancient enemy, who looked to be the image of Sarka the Third and not one whit older, though one had preceded the other into the world by many centuries.

"Still the pleasant, congenial Dalis, I see!" smiled Sarka the First.

For the moment it seemed that Dalis would die there of his seething anger; but he answered no word for all of a minute. Then:

"This mad grandson of yours has made me a prisoner, until such time as I concur in all his plans!"

"If he says you are a prisoner, that you are!" snapped the elder Sarka angrily. "Son, what is this thing you plan?"

"For almost a century," replied Sarka, "I have been planning this. I knew, when father told me that Dalis had sworn he was able to halt for a moment the headlong flight of the Earth in its orbit, that Dalis did not lie or bluff! In your day, even, that was possible, and I continued with the knotty problem until I deduced the manner of its doing. I, too, can halt the Earth's rotation, or throw it out of its orbit! I took your idea, Dalis, *independently* of you, knowing you would never reveal your secret to a Sarka, and amplified it until I can not only halt the Earth in its orbit, but throw it out of its orbit entirely!"

For a moment Sarka studied the angry face of Dalis, and his own was very thoughtful.

"Dalis," he said at last, "I wish you were not our

enemy! For you are a genius, and the world has need of all the knowledge of such genius as it possesses. Why do you oppose us?"

"Because," snarled Dalis, "I guessed something of your plan that I do not like! I do not like the Sarkas, never have; but neither have the Sarkas any love for me! When you spoke to us all, I knew that somehow you had discovered the secret! You spoke, when you delivered your ultimatum, of attacking the Moon, and after it Mars! You also granted to my Gens what would have seemed a great honor—to anyone who did not fathom the tricky scheming of the Sarkas!—that of being the first into the fray! If we are to be first, and the Moon is to be the first attacked, then you plan to relieve the world forever of me, your arch-enemy, by exiling me and all my Gens upon the Moon! A dead world, covered with ashes, whose people dwell in dank caverns, like gnomes of the underworld...."

"Stay!" snapped Sarka. "But I granted you a greater honor even than that, Dalis! I planned on your Gens, led by you, making a successful conquest of the Moon—because only such a genius as Dalis could force

from this dead world a living for his Gens! Because you are the wisest of the Spokesmen, I planned for you the greatest task! Because I need you ... I do not slay you!"

"I thank you," bowing low, with the deepest sarcasm, "but you honor me too much! And tell me, pray, if it is not true that you plan for the Sarkas their choice of the best and newest worlds of the Universe?"

Sarka did not answer for a second, while his sensitive nostrils quivered with fury. The Sarkas had not noticed, but Jaska, daughter of Cleric, had admitted herself through the Exit Dome, in a way known only to Sarka and to herself, as she had entered many times before so as not to disturb Sarka at his labors. She now stood silently there, divesting herself of her Belt and outer clothing, beneath which was the golden toga worn by all the women of the earth. Dalis, however, had seen her, and his eyes narrowed craftily as he awaited the answer of Sarka.

"Dalis," said Sarka softly, "it is not for you to question me, but to obey me! I have not undertaken this step

without mastering all its details, and I refuse to allow you to swerve me in a single one of them from my plan."

Dalis straightened, standing stiffly at savage attention, and met the angry eyes of Sarka without flinching. There was no fear in Dalis, as all the world knew. But he was a schemer, and selfish.

"After all," he said, "I have known Sarkas to make promises they could not keep! How do I know, how does the world know, that you can do what you say you can do?"

"If," said Sarka, "I close all contact of this laboratory with the world outside, so that none may hear what I say save we four, and I then whisper here the secret you never told, Dalis, when my father's father refused to help you—will you then believe?"

The face of Dalis went suddenly white, but he nodded, his eyes burning redly. Jaska moved closer to the men, who stood near the table of the vari-colored lights.

"You needed my father's father," said Sarka softly, "because the secret of your scheme rested here in this laboratory, which is the highest point in the world! You pretended to need him in your scheme; but you did not need my father's father, though you *did* need his laboratory, and some of the facts of science that *he* discovered. So you came to him with your scheme, discovered that he believed, though he denied it, your scheme was possible—because he refused to aid you in it! Then, as an excuse to re-enter this laboratory, you told him you would return within two days! Now, shall I tell you your secret?"

The lips of Dalis were moving soundlessly. His right hand started to rise, as though he would make it signal the negative he was unable for a moment to speak. But even as he stood there, swaying slightly on his feet, Sarka dashed to the lights on the table, disconnecting them one by one; to the Revolving Beryl, which then ceased to revolve for the first time in centuries—whirled when he had finished, and stepped to the very center of the room.

"Now," he whispered, "your secret, Dalis!"

Still the hand upraised, still Dalis tried to speak, and could not.

Sarka spoke, in a hoarse, almost terrified whisper, four words:

"The Beryl! The Ovoids!"

Gasps of surprise from the other two Sarkas, whose eyes for a second flashed to the huge Beryl, which now was still, silent—and blind. Dawning comprehension was evident in their faces.

"The success of the Revolving Beryl," whispered Sarka, "which sees all that transpires in this world, depends on one fact: that its revolving is proportionately timed to infinite exactness with the revolution of the Earth about its axis! This Beryl is the Master Beryl of the Earth, which was why Dalis needed this Beryl, and could use no other!"

"Suppose that for a period of two days, uniformly progressive, this Beryl were forced to revolve in sharp jerks at an increasing rate of speed! With all

connections in place, and all the world's Beryls attuned to the speed of this one—what would happen? What would happen if a single Gens were marshalled in warlike array atop the area of the Gens, and kept up a steady, rhythmic march for a period of hours?"

"In a few hours," whispered Sarka the First, "the roof of the Gens area would begin to vibrate, to vibrate throughout all the area, and even into all surrounding Gens areas—and in time the roof would collapse!"

"Exactly!" said Sarka, breathing heavily. "This Beryl, when attuned to all other Beryls in the world, would have this vibratory effect, not only on a certain area of the world—but upon the entire world!—Force the speed of the Beryls to the uttermost limit, and you sway the world to your will! As a marching horde would sway the roof of a vast section of the world if the horde's commander willed!

"But that is not enough! The world would tremble, but nothing more! The Earth's store of Ovidum, which is Anti-Gravitational, and used in minute quantities in our Anti-Gravitational Ovoids, is evenly distributed

throughout the world. By vibration of the Beryls I can control it, scatter it or gather it all together wherever I will! By shifting through vibration this Anti-Gravitational material, I can disrupt, make uneven, or nullify the pull of gravity on the Earth!"

"That would do it," said Dalis, finding his voice at last; "but how would you control the course the Earth would take, thus thrown out of its orbit?"

"That, my dear Dalis, is for the moment my secret!"

"But is it?" Dalis suddenly shouted.

Before the three Sarkas could recover from their surprise at the man's sudden vehemence, he made a swift, terrifying move. He leaped away from them to stand beside Jaska, daughter of Cleric.

"Sarka," he shrieked, "I know you love this woman! Note this little tube I hold against her side. With it I can cause her to vanish for all time, merely by a slight pressure of the fingers! And that will I do, unless you immediately open all contacts with the world and

remain silent while I tell the people of Earth how you would betray them!"

The three Sarkas were petrified with amazement and horror, for they recognized the slender tube in the hand of Dalis as a Ray Director, the world's greatest engine of destruction, and knew that it would do exactly as Dalis had said it would.

Automatically, because they were brave men, they had stepped a trifle closer to Jaska and Dalis. Perspiration poured from their cheeks as they stared at this rebel. But their fears were for Jaska, who now spoke for the first time.

"Let him do as he wills," she said smilingly, "since for the good of the world I do not fear to die! Refuse him, Sarka, and know that I go into Death's Darkness loving you always, and knowing that you will succeed in the end, in spite of the opposition of men like Dalis!"

A man of unexpected actions, this Dalis, for while the attentions of the Sarkas were on the little tableau he

had staged, his eyes had darted to the Beryl, to the control which Sarka had touched to still its revolving. Now he sprang away from Jaska, was free of her and the Sarkas before any could move to intercept him.

He dashed to the Beryl. Instantly it swept into motion, while Dalis whirled to face the Sarkas, and from his lips came a burst of triumphant laughter. One hand was on the Beryl Control, the other still held the Ray Director.

"Fools!" he cried. "Fools! Duped like children! And now it is Dalis who is master of the world! Move closer to me, and I will turn my Ray Director upon this Beryl, which you have so kindly informed me is master of all the Beryls and of all Ovidum deposits! Be glad that I do not turn it upon you; but for you I have a kinder, more honorable fate! I now am master, and will direct the destiny of the world! But I will never leave it, because I suspect that it is the most pleasant of all the worlds! I will, however, choose for the Sarkas a world that shall be the dreariest in all the Universe!"

The Sarkas whirled as soft laughter came from Jaska, daughter of Cleric. Strange, lilting laughter. They turned in time to see her vanish through the Exit Dome; but for a long moment her jeering laughter seemed to sound in the laboratory she had left-and, to judge by her laughter, had betrayed! For Dalis, arch-traitor, echoed her laughter!

Chapter 6: *The Beryls in Tune*

"Remember," said Dalis, as the Beryl began to revolve and its humming mounted moment by moment to normal, "that you must concur in whatever I say to the people of the Earth—for if you do not, I swear that I will destroy this Master Beryl! Then what happens to your scheme, Sarka the Third? You see, there is no change in the plans, save one: I am the master, not you!"

Dalis was not a madman, for the world conceded him place in its list of geniuses next below the three Sarkas, which was high honor indeed; but Dalis possessed in abundance that most universal of all human emotions—jealousy. For centuries he had been nursing it, watching the Sarkas always in the niches just above him, yet never being able to attain to their eminence. Now....

He had outwitted them. It might be for a moment only, but while his mastery lasted he would drink deeply of personal satisfaction. Now, however, there was no gloating in his face, for he realized, as Sarka

had realized, the infinite gravity of the whole situation. If a mistake were made, the world would plunge to destruction—or go cooling forever in a headlong race through space.

"I keep the Ray Director hidden," he whispered, while the murmuring of the Master Beryl mounted as it gained speed again, "but know you, Sarkas, that its muzzle points at the Master Beryl, always!"

Now the forms of Earth were appearing on the Beryl. Men in countless hordes were maneuvering in myriads, legions and armies, across the face of the globe. There was no marching, but an effortless, swift as light almost, aerial maneuvering. For each human being possessed the tight-fitting metalized cloth, with the gleaming helmet in whose skull-pan was the Anti-Gravitational Ovoid, which was the "outside" garment of earthlings. With the Ovoid sitting exactly against the skull, man had but to will himself in any direction, at any livable height, and the action took place. In the same way, one man, to whom others in an organization gave allegiance by appointment, could will all his underlings into whatever formation he

desired.

As beautiful and effortless at the flight of those birds which had vanished from the earth centuries before.

"Remember, Dalis," said Sarka, "that while the speed of the Earth in its orbit is between eighteen and nineteen miles per second, once thrown out of its orbit, and forced to follow a straight or nearly straight line, the speed may be many times that-or much less!"

"The simplest facts of science," snarled Dalis, "were known to me a thousand years before you were born! Now I shall tell the Spokesmen of the Gens, and be sure that you second what I say!"

He paused. Then, raising his voice impressively, he spoke.

"O Spokesmen of the Gens, O Gens of Earth, hark ye to the words of Dalis and of Sarka! The time has come to try the experiment of which Sarka told you, and which I, Dalis, of the Gens of Dalis, have found good, and hereby certify! See that all your Beryls are

mathematically tuned to catch every sound, every vibration, every picture, from this Beryl of Sarka, henceforth to be known as the Master Beryl!

"No matter what happens, no matter what changes take place in the temperature of your homes, no matter what storms may come, touch not your Beryls until instructed from this laboratory! Tune your Beryls, then leave them, and hasten faster with your preparations for war! Each Spokesman of a Gens will at once instruct the members of his Gens that all partitions between families shall immediately be removed, outward from a common center in each case, until one hundred families occupy a single dwelling place. Materials from destroyed partitions shall be carefully hoarded, and the newer and bigger areas shall become maneuvering places for the hundred families which will occupy each given area!

"Facing a crisis as we are, no thought can be given to privacy, and neighborly quarrels must be forgotten! This move is necessary because no single dwelling place is large enough to be used as a place of maneuver—and from now on until the command is

given, maneuvers must not be held Outside! For hark ye, O Spokesmen, O Gens of Earth, we are about to start upon our voyage into outer space! Spokesmen, call in your maneuvering myriads! You have five minutes!"

In five minutes not a flying man could be seen in all the cold, stormy outside. Dalis spoke again.

"Tune your Beryls and remove partitions, taking care that in reducing partitions you so estimate your stresses and strains that the roof of the world be not endangered by weight that is unsupported, or improperly supported!

"Food Conservers, redouble your production and rush your transportation of Food Capsules!

"Mothers of men, take over the labors of your sons and your husbands! Sisters and sweethearts of men, join the myriads in maneuvers, for you, too, may require knowledge of fighting!"

In spite of himself, an ejaculation of admiration

escaped the lips of Sarka. Hearing it, Dalis turned to him, and a flush of pleasure tinged his cheeks as Sarka shaped one word with his lips:

"Excellent!"

Then, after a pause, Sarka spoke directly to the Gens of Earth.

"Take heed of the words of Dalis, for they are also the words of the Sarkas!"

Then an expression of surprise flashed across the face of Sarka as Dalis' fingers began to move in a swift sort of pantomime—for the sign manual he used was the secret manual of Jaska and Sarka! His heart cold within him at this new proof of her betrayal, Sarka nevertheless noted the words which dropped silently off the fingers of this enemy of the Sarkas.

"You are wise to resist no further! Together we can do much, and if you give your word not to oppose me, we can work together; but I will be the master!"

"But, if we grant you the mastery, will you heed our advice if it is good?"

"I will, but I alone will be the judge of its worth!"

"Then we work together henceforth. Let us begin! In the time required to move from here to the Moon, our people will have ample opportunity to perfect themselves in maneuvers! Are you ready, O my father, and father's father?"

"Ready!" they said together.

But for a moment Dalis hesitated. "Your word!" he snapped, looking at each Sarka in turn, and each in his turn nodded. They had given their word, but not their love, to Dalis. Dalis bowed low to Sarka the Youngest, who darted to the onyx base in which revolved the Master Beryl, and pressed a small lever of metalized jade, set in a slot on the southern side of the base of onyx. The humming sound within the Beryl became perceptibly louder, and as the minutes passed, and Sarka stood, arms folded, watching the Revolving Beryl, it continued to increase.

Here was the crisis, and as they watched its sure, certain approach, they forgot their enmities, Dalis and the Sarkas, and watched the whirling Beryl. Minute by minute its humming increased. The figures still were plain to be seen within the Beryl, but were becoming blurred of outline. Partitions had been removed all over the earth, increasing the size of rooms a hundredfold, reducing their number a hundredfold. The Gens of Earth, by hundred-families, were maneuvering under the Heads of Hundreds. The depths of the Master Beryl, therefore, was a maze of flying men, with their extremities slightly blurred, and becoming more so as the Master Beryl increased its speed.

Here now was shown the value of the organization fostered by Sarka the First—for in all the world there was no single Beryl out of tune with the Master Beryl; and as the Master Beryl increased the speed of its revolving, so increased at the same time the speed of all the other Beryls. Minute by minute the humming of the Master, and with it the others, increased in volume.

"Father!" spoke Sarka. "To the Observatory, behind the Beryl, please, to watch the stars, and from them to note the direction we take when the combined vibrations of the Beryls have affected the quiescence of Earth's deposits of Ovidum and, through its shifting, disturbed the flight of the Earth in its orbit!"

With a brief nod Sarka's father hurried around the Master Beryl to the tiny Observatory beyond, from which, through the Micro-Telescopes, those who knew could read the secrets of the planets, the stars—the Universe. Sarka watched him go, wondering if Dalis might not forbid him. But Dalis merely watched him go and said nothing.

Now that the time of Change was upon the world, Dalis realized his responsibility. It was little wonder that he began to be for the first time a little bit afraid.

"Note, Dalis!" snapped Sarka, and Dalis started nervously as his name was spoken. "Feel the trembling of the laboratory, just as the same trembling affects all the other buildings in the world in which Beryls are located. As the minutes pass the

trembling will go deeper and deeper, and by tomorrow the first tremors will be reaching into the Earth to several miles below the last habitable Inner Level! And then....

"Then," repeated Sarka tersely, "my father will know by his study of the stars in which new direction we are traveling! For within twenty-four hours the Earth will have started on its voyage of conquest!"

"Is there no way, Sarka," queried Dalis, "by which we can control the direction of our flight!"

"There *is* a way, O wise and gallant Dalis! But since you do not know it, who now is master?"

Dalis' face became as pale as chalk, and Sarka smiled a little as he watched him. Then, wondering what new resolve stirred the depths of this master egotist of the earth, he watched emotions flash to and fro across the face of Dalis, watched the color return to his cheeks. The cold of death gripped at his heart when Dalis spoke.

"I do not fear death, O wise and gallant Sarka!" he mocked. "For I have lived fully and well, and for many, many centuries! You know that I do not fear to slay people of the Earth, for did I not propose to your father's father that a flood would be beneficial to unfit earthlings? Hear, then! Keep your secret, and I shall allow the Earth to go outward into space, out of control, in whatever direction it will. If any other worlds happen to lie in our pathway...."

Dalis shrugged indifferently, turning his back on Sarka, to peer again into the depths of the Master Beryl, whose voice had risen to a vaster murmur, whose pictures were becoming moment by moment more blurred as time fled irrevocably into eternity.

Sarka the First took advantage of his opportunity, and leaped at the back of Dalis, hands extended to fasten them in the throat of his ancient enemy. Dalis whirled, with a burst of laughter, and the muzzle of his Ray Director covered the person of the First Sarka. In a flash the spot where Sarka the First had been was vacant, and there was no single sign to show that he had ever stood there!

Silence then in the laboratory, save for the mounting
murmur of the Master Beryl!

Chapter 7: *Outer Space*

"He only proved a belief I have entertained for centuries!" snarled Dalis. "That all the male Sarkas are fools—and the females for bearing them!"

Sarka said nothing, but within his breast a deep hatred was forming for Dalis. He had disliked him before, and had been amused by him; but in the busy life of Sarka there had been no time for hatred of anyone. Busy people had no time for hatreds.

"You should be torn to pieces for that, Dalis!" was all he said. "We needed my father's father in our efforts! But the loss to the world of one super-genius cannot be balanced by slaying another—so you are safe!

"What he could do, I can do!" snapped Dalis.

Sarka turned away from him, seating himself beside the table of the vari-colored lights, and his heart was heavy as lead in his breast. He blamed Jaska for much of this, and his heart was burdened, despite her treachery, by the fact that he loved her, always would

love her. Love was the one possession which made centuries of life desirable to men of the Earth. For men could spend centuries in seeking a true mate, knowing that there were other centuries still in which to enjoy her. Woman was man's greatest boon, his excuse for living, as was man excuse for woman. Through the centuries, when humankind remained forever young, the joy in each other of those truly mated grew as their knowledge grew....

And now Jaska had failed Sarka, when for half a century they had loved each other! Why had she done it? He had given her no reason to do so. Had there been some other reason? Why had she laughed, and left them, after the betrayal of the Master Beryl into the hands of Dalis?

"Before God," whispered Sarka, "I believe that you, Jaska, were playing a game to dupe Dalis, as he played a game to dupe us!"

Down in his heart he was not sure. But somehow, just to whisper to himself his faith in Jaska, gave it back to him in some measure, and by so much lightened the

weight upon his heart. For now his responsibilities were greater than they had ever been before, and he had need of all his faculties.

"She'll come back, or somehow communicate with me, and explain everything," he told himself. But he refused to ponder on how Dalis the betrayer had gained possession of the secret sign manual he had believed known only to Jaska and himself. That, too, might be explained satisfactorily, for Dalis was cunning.

From the side of the laboratory opposite the Revolving Beryl came a soft tinkling sound, like the striking of a musical bell. Sarka rose wearily, strode to the wall, where a narrow aperture opened, in which rested Food Capsules sufficient for one meal for three men. He smiled wryly. They knew then, the Food Conservers deep in the earth as they were, that Sarka the First was no more—and sent food for three men! All the world knew, perhaps, yet no single person had raised voice in protest—or if any had, the mounting murmur of the Beryls had drowned it out.

"Sarka!" spoke Dalis suddenly. "At what time do you estimate that the flight of the Earth in its orbit will be materially affected?"

"It is being affected this moment, Dalis, shifting the Ovidum store!" said Sarka shortly. "Within twelve hours we will be in readiness to start our journey!"

Remaining absolutely motionless within the domed laboratory, it was now possible to feel the ever so slight motion, not only of the laboratory, but of the mountain crest upon which it rested. Not so much a to-and-fro motion as a round-about motion.

Just as the slightest sound flies outward through space endlessly, and the slightest vibration moves outward until the end of time and of space, Sarka knew that the vibration set up by the Beryl, slight though it was, was already being felt at the Poles of the Earth. Not enough to be noticed there, but existant, just the same.

"In twelve hours the world will be fighting against this combined vibration and Anti-Gravitational Force we

are starting, and second by second accelerating," Sarka explained to Dalis: "fighting to remain on its pathway about the Sun! But we will win against it, and with each new vibration, each succeeding one being more strongly felt, we will force the Earth that much more against the *pull* which holds it in its orbit!"

The laboratory was trembling. The mountain beneath it was trembling. Both in accordance with scientific design. There was no element of chance in it, for the mountain moved, and the laboratory on its crest moved, as science willed. It was now difficult for Sarka to remain still where he sat, for the trembling was exciting his heart action, and causing the blood to rush to his cheeks, making him feverish. He rose to his feet and began pacing the floor.

He strode to the jade lever, moved it ahead a fraction of a fraction of an inch, and perceptibly the murmuring of the Beryl increased, as did the trembling of the laboratory and of the mountain.

Twelve hours later exactly, Sarka shouted a single

word to Dalis.

"Now!"

The laboratory was swinging about in a sort of circle in a way that made one dizzy if one remained still for the merest second. Sarka, glancing out into the Outside, across which blew the storms of the heights, and noting that no cracks appeared in the surface of the world's vast roof, knew that this swaying motion had been transmitted evenly to all the Earth, and that, so far at least, his calculations had been correct.

But Dalis was in a cold sweat of fear, and deathly sick. The motion of the laboratory, like the inside of a whirling top, made him ill, though Sarka could tell that he fought against it with all his great will.

Sarka strode to him, looked him in the eyes for a moment. Dalis looked back, glaring defiance.

"Are you afraid, Dalis?" he shouted, to be heard above the screaming of the Master Beryl.

"I am not afraid," croaked Dalis. "Has the time arrived?"

Sarka paused, as though for dramatic effect, and raised his right hand high, while his left hand dropped to the metalized jade lever. There still was room in the slot in the onyx base for the lever to move forward ever so little.

"We have reached the exact place," cried Sarka, "where the Earth can, by pressure upon this lever, be continued on in its orbit—or forced out of it—out into space! Which shall it be, Dalis? If I move the lever forward we start our voyage, and may not be able to return!"

For a moment the nostrils of Dalis quivered as though with fear. His face was white with his illness; but out of his eyes peered the fanatic self-confidence of the man.

"Push it forward, O Sarka!" he managed.

Sarka, smiling slightly, pushed the lever to its

uttermost limit, still with his right arm upraised. For full five minutes he stood thus, and then....

"Now!" he shouted, bringing down his arm. "We have begun our journey into space! Come, let us look Outside, and await the first reports from my father!"

The two men, forgetting again for a moment the fact of their enmity, strode to the southern wall of the laboratory and looked out across the roof of the world.

"You will note, Dalis," said Sarka conversationally, "that in a matter of hours, the roaring of the Etheric winds will possess everything! We will have passed into the infinite reaches of Outer Space, where, if I may make so bold as to say so, it were better if Dalis, self-named master of the world, knew whither he was going!"

Chapter 8: *Moon Minions Prepare*

"It is time," said Sarka softly, "that we who have urged the world to forget its quarrels should forget our own. What difference who is master, so long as success attend our efforts?"

"Then tell me your secret of control of our flight!" snapped Dalis.

Before Sarka could answer, however, Sarka the Second entered the laboratory area before the Master Beryl. He looked a question at his son, and Sarka knew that his father was asking what had become of Sarka the First. He shrugged his shoulders, and nodded his head toward Dalis. Sarka the Second gave no more sign of perturbation than had his son, but deep within his eyes were signal fires of fury which centuries of penance on the part of Dalis would not erase. But now, with Sarka the First gone, Dalis must live.

"We are headed," said Sarka's father softly, "in the general direction of the Moon! If we could travel

toward it in a straight line, we would reach it, if we kept our pace of about eighteen miles per second, in approximately four hours! But since we are out of control, I fear we will pass it too far away for our fighters to fly across the intervening space! Or we may be drawn against it, in planetary collision, which of course means annihilation. We are traveling noticeably faster than while in the earth's orbit. I am able to see something of the preparation of Moon-men to receive us!"

Dalis turned to Sarka, and the perspiration bedewed his forehead. In order to make this mad mission successful, he must know Sarka's secret of control. Had he been in Sarka's place, *he* would have kept his secret, no matter what happened, and he believed in his heart that Sarka would do the same. It never occurred to him that Sarka, no matter who the master, would divulge his secret in order to save humanity from destruction.

"We have approximately four hours, Dalis!" Sarka prompted the betrayer. "I need at least an hour for my experiments! Do you, knowing as you do that I have

planned all this out, know exactly what course our voyage should take, still insist on holding the reins yourself?"

"I agree, for this time, to listen to your advice, as I promised you!"

"Then let me suggest that you do some of the work which I had planned should be done by my father's father! It is time that the world's Induction Conduits be placed in operation, in order that our people be supplied with equable temperature from the Earth's Core, as our temperature changes due to our position with relation to the sun! Stand back and give me the controls!"

For a moment Dalis stared at the two Sarkas. Would they seize power the moment he moved away from the Beryl Control? In their places he knew he would have done it. In their places he knew he would never have submerged self in the good of the people. But, somewhat diffidently, he moved away. Sarka the Second returned to the Observatory, behind the Beryl, while Sarka stopped before the table where the lights

were.

After a moment of thought-conversation with Sarka the Second in the Observatory, he dimmed the light which connected his laboratory with the headquarters of Klaser, in the Americas.

"Klaser," he barked, "for the period of one second cut the speed of every Beryl within your Gens to half its present speed!"

"I obey, O Sarka!" came the voice of Klaser.

::Have we changed direction?:: Sarka mentally questioned his father.

::Slightly, but we are curving away, instead of toward the Moon! Try again!::

Sarka dimmed the light of Cleric, who instantly made answer.

"I am here, Sarka!"

"Stop the Beryls of your Gens for two seconds, but be prepared to speed them up immediately afterward, if ordered, to the speed at which they are now revolving! Klaser, hold the speed of your Beryls as they are!"

"I obey, O Sarka!" came the musical tones of Cleric.

"I hear, O Sarka!" replied Klaser.

::Now, my father,:: queried Sarka again, telepathically,
::what direction do we travel?::

::We are heading in a direction which will cause us to pass the Moon at a distance of approximately fifty thousand miles!::

"From which point our fighters can reach the Moon in exactly two hours, after they have passed through our atmosphere!" cried Sarka exultantly, aloud.

::True, son!:: replied Sarka the Second, mentally. ::I suggest you hold our course steady as it is!::

The motion of the earth now was as that of a steadily falling body, and the shifting of the Ovidum store caused by vibrations set up by the Beryls had set the Earth on its course toward the Moon. Sarka now gave instructions to Klaser and to Cleric to return the speed of the Beryls to that which they had attained at the moment the journey of the Earth had begun—thus bringing them once more into harmony with the Master Beryl, and rendering the Ovidum static.

Dalis re-entered the laboratory from the Wall Tube, near the Dome Exit, by which he had passed down to the lowest Inner Level, and stared suspiciously at the two Sarkas. He found them half-smiling their satisfaction.

"We pass the Moon within fifty thousand miles!" exulted Sarka. "A flight of two hours for the Gens which attacks the Moon! Do you refuse, O Dalis, to send your Gens against the Moon?"

"Why not send the Gens of Gerd!" demanded Dalis. "He is the youngest of the Spokesmen, and what better test is there for him than this?"

"It is because he is so young that we do not wish to send him," replied Sarka coldly. "The colonization of the Moon by Earthlings requires the guiding genius of a Spokesman who has the experience of a Dalis—or a Sarka, else you would now be dead!"

"Then let it be a Sarka!" barked Dalis.

"Who, then, will control the further flight of the Earth?"

"You! Let your father lead my Gens against the Moon!"

"What will your Gens say, O Dalis? That their revered Spokesman feared to lead them in person?"

"Enough of this squabbling," snapped Sarka the Second. "Do you not realize that within a matter of hours, some Gens must be sent into battle? Come with me to the Observatory, where you will be given something beside squabbling with which to occupy your minds!"

Leaving the earth on its lonely flight through space, the three men hurried to the Observatory, where they seated themselves before the eye-pieces of the Micro-Telescopes, whose outer circles had been aimed at the Moon.

For a moment the three stared breathlessly at the surface of this dead sister of the Earth. They noted her valleys, her craters which seemed bottomless, and saw that even as they watched, valleys and craters became sharper of outline, proving that they were approaching the Moon at a tremendous speed. It seemed, too, as though they were heading toward sure collision, though Sarka the Second had said that they would pass the Moon at a distance of fifty thousand miles.

"You will note activity at the very rims of the craters!" said the Elder Sarka easily. "The craters are man-made, not volcanic, as some scientists believe, and are shaped to converge the rays of the sun, as our roof is created for the same purpose. But note the activity at the rims of the craters!"

Closer the men peered, studying the rims as instructed by Sarka the Second. All about them—and as they watched, activity became apparent on the inner slopes of the craters—winged creatures seemed to be flying. They looked like tiny oblate spheroids, and they were in swift action, darting to and fro like bees which have been disturbed in their hives.

"Those spheres are of metal," said Sarka the Second, "and they are the fighting Aircars of the Moon-men!"

Neither Dalis nor Sarka denied this statement, for they knew it to be fact. It became apparent that the movement of the Aircars was not a movement of chance, but as skillfully ordered as any maneuvers which had, during the last few hours, been executed by any of the Gens of Earth. That they were of metal became apparent when, through the Micro-Telescopes, the watchers caught the glint of the sun on the surfaces of the cars.

Sarka did a swift mental calculation, and announced the result.

"Those Aircars average something like four hundred feet in length, and are doubtless filled with fighting Moon-men!"

"That's right," said Dalis, who also had been calculating this very thing, "but our Ray Directors will disintegrate the Aircars as easily as my Ray Director disintegrated Sarka the First!"

"The remaining Sarkas received this statement in silence, for Dalis' choice of a comparison had been an unhappy one, to say the least.

"I am wondering," said Sarka, "if you, my father, and you Dalis, have noted the peculiar appendages of the Aircars?"

"I saw them some minutes ago," said his father moodily, "and I am almost afraid to guess their use! If they are what I fear they are, then the Moon-men have been expecting this attack of ours for years and years, and have been preparing for it! If they have known, and have been preparing, then we are facing a race of super-Beings indeed—for we have known

but little of their activities!"

"What, then," said Dalis, "do you think is the purpose of those appendages?"

"Those appendages, cilia, flagella, call them whatever you wish, are man-made tentacles, created for the purpose of seizing, crushing and destroying—then discarding...."

For a full two minutes the three men sat there, and horrible doubts flooded their brains. For the conclusion was obvious. The Gens of Earth would go into action flying, not as organizations, inside an Aircar, but as individuals, in swarms, myriads, legions and hordes. In order to do the utmost damage with their Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators, they must approach within a reasonable distance—and the picture of those mighty tentacles, hurled like leashed lightning bolts into the midst of the attackers, folding in individuals by scores and hundreds, crushing them and dropping them contemptuously, was horrible in the extreme to contemplate!

It was difficult to estimate the possible speed of the Aircars of the Moon-men, at least at this distance. Besides, perhaps not a single one of them was traveling at top speed, because of the fact of their crowded traffic.

This thought passed through the minds of the three men.

"But we'll know," said Sarka dully, "when they get into action. For if I am not mistaken, those Aircars are being mustered on the rims of those craters to await orders, not to resist our attack, but to launch their own attack before we are ready! Dalis, are you going to allow your Gens to go into action against these Outsiders, without the inspiration of your personal leadership?"

The nostrils of Dalis were quivering with the intensity of his emotion. His vast egotism told him that he, Dalis, could successfully combat these Aircars of the Moon-men, and he wished with all his heart to issue the orders to his Gens. But, vain as he was, he did not even wish to have the appearance of acceding to the

original plan of Sarka! Sarka had planned for Dalis to attack the dwellers of the Moon, and Dalis had refused. Now, when this challenge of the Aircars was a direct challenge to his genius as a potential warlord of earth and he wished to accept the challenge, he was torn two ways.

Should he go ahead under the common leadership of the Sarkas? Or should he still refuse battle—and perhaps see some lesser Spokesman go forth to win glory and imperishable renown to himself?

A thought message, a command almost, impinged on the brains of the three.

"I wish to speak with you aloud!:: The message was from Jaska!

The three men rose and darted into the room of the Master Beryl. They had no sooner entered than the clear voice of Jaska sounded in the laboratory.

"Sarka, I am no traitor! I am Jaska, who loves you! I am in the headquarters of Dalis at Ohi, and the Gens

of Dalis has indicated its allegiance to me, having been informed by me that it is the wish of Dalis, whose presence is needed at the place of the Master Beryl! Command us, O Sarka, for we are ready to attack!"

There the voice ended, while the two Sarkas turned again to face Dalis.

Sarka now was glad that Dalis knew the secret sign manual, and his fingers worked swiftly as he spoke to the rebel.

[Will you, then, Dalis, allow your Gens to be led to glory by a woman? A woman, moreover, who has duped you?]

"The woman is a fool!" said Dalis. "She will lead the Gens to destruction!"

"Who, then, will be blamed if she does? Your Gens believe she is their new Spokesman at your wish! If they are told otherwise, they will think that Dalis himself is afraid to lead them!"

"We shall see," said Dalis, "if I could win honor by leading my Gens in a successful attack against the Moon-men, how much greater will be my glory if Jaska attacks, is repulsed—and I go in to turn defeat into victory!"

Thus spake the colossal selfishness of Dalis, who took no thought of the possible, nay, certain, loss of countless lives because of his obstinancy.

"I suggest," he said, "that you instruct your beloved Jaska to make ready; for if I am not mistaken, when we return to the Observatory we will discover that the Aircars of the Moon-men have left their craters and are racing outward from the Moon to meet us! Or perhaps you would lead my Gens, to safeguard Jaska!"

Chapter 9: *The Attack of the Yellow Stars*

"Why should I safeguard Jaska?" asked Sarka quietly.

"She is a true daughter of Cleric! If Cleric does not fear for her to be Spokesman of a Gens, why should I? He is her father. If she wins, the more glory will be hers! If she loses, she will at least have tried!"

"Meaning," snarled Dalis, "that I have refused even to try!"

Sarka shrugged expressively, and the three stepped once more into the Observatory, took their places before the Micro-Telescopes. For a moment they could not see the outline of the Moon, for during their brief sojourn in the laboratory the Moon seemed to have disintegrated, flying into countless spheroidal pieces.

"You see?" said Dalis. "The Moon-men do not wait for us! They attack!"

It was all too true that the Aircars which had been mustered at the rims of the Moon's craters had been hurled outward into space, outward toward the on-

rushing Earth, and the myriad numbers of them for a time shut out all view of the surface of the Moon.

"God!" spoke Sarka, and it was like a prayer. His cheeks were pale as death, for in a moment he would speak the word which would send the Gens of Dalis, under the leadership of Jaska, out against these formidable Aircars of the Moon-men, and the appearance of the on-rushing cars was terrifying. That their flying radius, outward, was a great one, was manifest by the fact that the Earth would not for another hour reach its closest estimated point with the Moon.

Sarka, exchanging glances with his father, rose and stepped again into the laboratory. Even as he entered the room of the Master Beryl, Jaska's broken signal came through.

"I am ready, Sarka!" came her soft voice, vibrant with confidence. "The Gens is ready, and the Gens believes in me!"

For a moment Sarka hesitated before taking the

plunge. Then he spoke the fatal words.

"Go, Jaska, and my love goes with you!"

As the Earth approached closer to the Moon, the revolving of the Beryls had been decreased, so that the motion of the Master Beryl was almost normal—normal being that speed with which it revolved when it was necessary to use it for visual contact with the people of the Earth.

Out of the area of the Gens of Dalis darted the green specks which were the flying people of Dalis! Sarka, staring in among them, focussing the Beryl-microscope, sought for some way of identifying Jaska, who led them. A thrill coursed through him when he made her out, unmistakably—dressed still in the tight white clothing of her own Gens, with the Red Lily of the house of Cleric on her breast and on her back! The daughter of Cleric was leading the Gens of Dalis into combat under her own colors and her father's insignia!

Sarka raced back to the Observatory, seated himself

again to watch the attack, which must of necessity be joined within a matter almost of minutes. Those myriads of Aircars flying outward from the Moon, had seemed invincible; but up until now he had never seen an entire Gens mustered at one time. His whole being thrilled with the awesome grandeur of the spectacle; it seemed that not an able-bodied individual of the Gens of Dalis had failed to answer the muster of the Gens.

Millions upon millions of people, taking off the icy roof of that part of the Earth lying between Ohi and the North Pole, from the heart of what had once been part of the Pacific Ocean.

So many of them were there that when they were free of the Earth, flashing outward at two thousand miles an hour, it was impossible to see the Moon or those formidable Aircars—and still, out of the heart of the area of the Gens of Dalis, came other myriads, each flight waiting only for the preceding flight to clear!

The green, tight fitting clothing of the Gens of Dalis, each individual wearing the yellow star of the

Spokesman of the Gens! A marvelous, awe-inspiring sight!

And this was but a single area, and the earth was divided into twelve such areas, some smaller, none larger, which showed Sarka for the first time a hint of the mighty man-power, and fighting woman-power which he controlled. However, once free of the Earth, conduct of the fight would be in the hands of the Spokesman—Jaska, acting for Dalis.

Sarka turned to Dalis, his eyes flashing.

"Does it not thrill you, O Dalis?" he demanded. "Do you not wish now that you had gone out with your people as their leader?"

"They follow Jaska like sheep," he stated with a snort. "But wait! My Gens seem invincible, because it bulks between us and the Aircars of the Moon-Dwellers! Wait, see how the battle goes! The Gens may yet have need of Dalis!"

Sarka studied those outgoing hosts, which were

dwindling away to mere specks with vast speed, for through the cordons and cordons of them he could now see the Aircars more plainly. It was still possible, when one looked through the Micro-Telescopes, to see the slim figure of Jaska leading the attack. She was in the vanguard of the Gens of Dalis leading her people onward as though she had been born to command—utterly fearless.

"And I was small enough," whispered Sarka, "to doubt you! I even told you that I doubted you! Forgive me, Jaska! Forgive me!"

And still, as Level after Level gave up its myriads, the Gens of Dalis shot forth from the Gens area, and winged away, following the lead of Jaska. Millions of people, armed with Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators. How tiny the individuals seemed, against the mighty bulk of those Aircars of the Moon!

But Sarka did not fear, save for the safety of Jaska, as he was realizing anew that he had scarcely skimmed the surface of the man-might of the Earth.

Now, seen through the myriads of the Dalis Gens, he could see again the on-rushing Aircars, and his heart misgave him for a moment as he could tell, by estimation, that at least a hundred families were outlined against each individual car, which moment by moment grew larger.

Those tentacles were now much in evidence, rising and falling under and around the racing Aircars like serpents, or dragging ropes; but seeming like living things in the sentient manner of their moving—eager to come in contact with the first of the earthlings, and to wrap those tentacles about them, crush them, hurl them into space.

Sarka went back into the laboratory only long enough to attune the Beryls of the Earth to a point where the Earth would remain almost stationary, comparatively speaking, taking a curving course about the surface of the Moon, as it had for countless millions of years coursed about the Sun.

Then, back to the Observatory, to see how went the battle. Through the Micro-Telescopes the first

meeting was plain to be seen. The Gens of Dalis rushed headlong to meet the Aircars and many of them rushed headlong to their destruction.

Sarka noted a group of perhaps a hundred people break forth from the vanguard of the attackers, and mount to a safe height above the Aircars against which the Gens were hurling themselves. A sigh of relief escaped him, and he wished there were some way in which he could learn the individual identities of the ninety and nine who had taken Jaska forcibly out of danger! For her white clothing, and her Red Lily of Cleric were plainly visible and recognizable! The men of the Gens of Dalis might permit the leadership of a woman, but they would not permit her to be needlessly endangered.

Sarka turned to Dalis, and noted that the face of the master egotist was pale and drawn, his nostrils quivering with emotion, as he watched his Gens go into battle, and a feeling of satisfaction coursed through Sarka like a little white flame. Dalis was proud of his Gens, and now was wishing that he, and not Jaska, were leading them onward.

"I would wager something," whispered Sarka to himself, "that Dalis will not be able to stand it! That before battle has been joined for ten minutes, he will have gone out to take over the leadership of the Gens! Jaska must have guessed that, too! Wise, clever Jaska!"

With a fearless massing of forces, the people of the yellow stars joined battle with the Aircars! The manner of men who flew the Aircars was still unknown to the people of Earth.

But in a trice they would know.

In a matter of minutes Earth would realize the horror of what faced the Gens of Dalis, whom Jaska led!

For with the sending out of their Aircars the Moon-men had given but the merest hint of their ponderous, devastating might!

Chapter 10: *Tentacles of Terror*

Dalis had always been a stormy petrel, but as he sat before his Micro-Telescope, watching his Gens go into battle against the Moon-men, not even Sarka the Second guessed the depth of infamy of which Dalis was capable.

Dalis had given a hint, but Sarka had, in his sudden realization of the fact that Jaska really loved him, and was no traitor, forgotten that hint. How had Dalis learned the secret sign-manual of Jaska and Sarka? Therein lay the hint.

Dalis, in common with all other Earth's scientists, possessed the ability to think deeply, yet to so mask his thoughts that no one else could grasp them telepathically—and it was well for the peace of mind of the Sarkas that they could not read the black thought of the man, or look into the future, even so far as a dozen years.

The Gens of the yellow stars moved into contact with the Aircars of the Moon. Earth and Moon were

gripped in the horror of war, the war between worlds, where no quarter might be asked or given, because fought between alien peoples who did not so much as comprehend each other's languages, or even their signals.

The people of the Gens swarmed about the Aircars like myriad swarms of angry bees, but it was only to Dalis that this simile came, for only Dalis, of these three, had ever seen a swarm of bees.

Sweeping in closely, the Gens brought forth from their resting places in their Sarka-Belts their Ray Directors and their Atom-Disintegrators, and turned the blighting rays of them against the gleaming, ice-colored sides of the aerial monsters.

But even as the Gens brought their instruments of destruction into play, the mighty tentacles of the first hundred Aircars had got into action. Down they whirled to catch at the flying bodies of the pigmylike individuals of the Gens, and hundreds of Earthlings were caught in those tentacles in the first moment of conflict.

Sarka studied the reaction of the people, thus captured. He could see the expressions of unutterable agony on their faces, could see their cheeks turn black with—what? There was no way of knowing; but all sorts of guesses were possible. Those tentacles, from their action upon the human beings which they encompassed, might be charged with electricity. For the people they captured turned black, then shriveled slowly—and were released by the tentacles....

They fell sluggishly away, through the great space which yet separated the Earth and the Moon. But the people who fell, fell aimlessly, going neither toward the Earth or the Moon, like black feathers in a vagrant breeze.

"Great God, do you see father?" cried Sarka. "The—whatever it is—that turns our people into cinders and drops them, has no effect on the Anti-Gravitational Ovoids in the skull-pans of the helmets, and without mental direction, the Ovoids neither rise nor fall but wander aimlessly!

"See? As the fight continues, those who still live, as

they dart here and there through the battle area, will be confronted continually by the blackened faces and shriveled figures of their departed friends, relatives and neighbors, and will see at first hand what will happen to themselves if they are caught by the tentacles!"

From the lips of Dalis came one single burst of laughter, filled with bitterness. No other word came from his lips, no other sign. He merely sat and stared, and masked his hell-black thoughts so that neither of the Sarkas might read them. But in the fertile mind of Dalis a plan was being born—a plan that, he knew, had always been growing back in his mental depths, somewhere, down the centuries, since first he had become an enemy of the Sarkas. The Sarkas ruled the Earth, and....

But he would spring his surprise when he believed the time right, for Dalis possessed a faculty which neither of the Sarkas possessed—an example of it being his incomprehensible knowledge of the secret code of moving fingers used by Sarka and Jaska.

The Gens of Dalis drew back in consternation at this wholesale taking off of the first line of attack. Out of that first line, comprising perhaps a thousand families, scarcely a hundred had escaped the groping of those mighty tentacles of the Aircars—and the black, shriveled things which had been men floated all about the Aircars which had destroyed them, warnings to those who followed them into the fray. Those who had somehow escaped the wrath of the tentacles in the first engagement fled back into the heart of the next line of sky-skirmishers, fear and horror in their faces.

Here, answering to the will of Jaska, a mile or so above the heart of the conflict, they reformed with their people, and prepared again to attack. But how to attack these formidable Aircars successfully?

That was the question. Ray Directors had been turned against them, but something was decidedly wrong. The first car to feel the blast of even one of those Ray Directors should have vanished, become as nothing, as had the body of Sarka the First before the Ray Director of Dalis.

But apparently nothing had happened. Why?

Grimly Dalis and the two remaining Sarkas pondered the problem, wondering at the same time what Jaska would now do, how reform her Gens, how send it again to an attack that seemed hopeless.

"There they go again!" whispered Sarka.

The first two myriads of the Gens of Dalis had now crowded together until they formed a veritable cloud which masked, for a moment, the Aircars of the Moon. Then, as one person, answering to the will of Jaska, they swept in to the attack again.

But as they approached the Aircars, they divided four ways—up, down, to right and to left, and smashed into the Aircars from four directions at once. Jaska, knowing that countless lives must be lost to destroy these monsters of the Moon, was trying to down them by mass attack, hoping that, while the inner groups gave their lives, those who followed after them would get in close enough to use their Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators.

"She is wasting lives to no avail!" cried Dalis. "There is a way to beat these people!"

"It is really your responsibility, O Dalis!" snapped Sarka. "Why do you not go out and lead your Gens? If you know, why remain here and watch the destruction of all the people of your Gens?"

"You know why our Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators do not work, or work but poorly? Because our fighters are within the gravitational pull of the Moon, instead of the Earth, and machines which work perfectly on Earth are thrown out of balance when under the influence of the Moon!"

"Then," cried Sarka, "we must sweep in close enough to our people...."

Without waiting to say another word, for thousands of men were dying each breath-space, Sarka raced into the laboratory and gave the signal to race up the speed of the Beryls, to attune them with the increasing speed of the Master Beryl, whose jade lever now was set at the halfway mark in the onyx

slot.

When he returned to the Observatory, Dalis was gone, and Sarka the Second sat alone.

"I knew he would go," said Sarka, "for he cannot endure to see someone else take credit for winning this first victory—if it is even possible to win it! I knew that, vain though he is, Dalis is yet a man!"

"I am not so sure of that, son!" replied the Elder Sarka. "For I have known him longer than you have! There's something else in that brain of his which takes no thought of the death of people of his Gens—or for the betterment of the other people of the Earth! I wonder...."

But even as he spoke, Dalis was away, flying free and fast toward the scene of battle. In a few minutes his will would be felt by his Gens, and Jaska could return again. Sarka sought for her. She was still safe, high above the battle. Thousands and thousands of those shriveled things now floated in the space about the cars, above them, below them, everywhere. But the

Gens of Dalis had at last caused some trouble to the Aircars of the Moon.

A hundred of them, like stricken birds, were falling downward toward the Moon, great holes torn in their sides. But as they fell, their tentacles, which whipped here and there like snakes in their death-throes, carried with them their full capacity in people of the Gens of Dalis!

With the partial destruction of the Aircars which were falling, the force that actuated the death-dealing of those tentacles seemed to have gone out of them. For the people now held in the grip of the mighty tentacles were still alive! Their squirmings could be plainly seen, and their cries could have been heard, had it not been that the noise of battle drowned out all other sounds.

A hundred Aircars falling, and the men and fighting women of the Gens of Dalis, with new courage in them now they realized that the Aircars were not entirely invincible, renewed the attack with savage vigor.

Taking no thought of the death which must surely come to them, they circled and pressed the Aircars; and when the tentacles caught at some of them, others climbed to the very body of the Aircars, over the shriveling bodies of the dying, and turned their Ray Directors and Atom Disintegrators against the gray sides of the monsters.

Even before Dalis had reached the vanguard of his Gens another hundred Aircars were falling, each with its tentacles wrapped tightly about such of the earthlings as they could grasp. Falling ... falling ... still living, plunging down.

Now Dalis had reached the scene of the fray, and was assuming command.

As he did so a single white-robed figure, life-size when seen through the Micro-Telescopes, darted out of the fray and headed at top speed for the dwelling place of Sarka. Jaska, relieved, was returning home!

But though Jaska flew at top speed, she did not seem to grow larger, or draw nearer to the Earth!

Out of the ruck of the defenders of the Moon, a single Aircar, whose gleaming gray side was marked with queer crimson splashes, broke free to pursue Jaska!

She fled at top speed, yet the Aircar was gaining, proof that the Moon had developed speed greater than Earth had attained.

"But why," queried Sarka, "does she draw no nearer?"

"Great God!" ejaculated Sarka the Second, after a brief examination of certain chartographs beside his Micro-Telescope. "We are moving away from the Moon! Something is forcing us away! The people of the Moon have something whose nature we do not know, capable of forcing them away from us—while they pull our people toward them! You see? If they pulled us toward them, we could overthrow them, for we outnumber them perhaps thousands to one; but if they force themselves away faster than the Gens of Dalis, if defeated, can follow us, they can destroy, or capture, the Gens at their leisure!"

Suddenly, out of the Earth, past the all-seeing eyes of

the Micro-Telescopes, swept a new myriad. Men in white, wearing the Red Lily of the House of Cleric! Cleric was sending out men to rescue Jaska from the Aircar which pursued her! But would Jaska or these who went forth to fetch her ever be able again to attain landing place upon the Earth!

It looked doubtful.

Even as Sarka asked himself this question fresh Aircars shot from the rims of Moon craters, rushing outward to add their weight in the battle against the Gens of Dalis. The Gens of Dalis was doomed!

In the mind of Sarka the Second there still loomed a hellish doubt that would not down.

The men of Cleric were surrounding Jaska now, protecting her with their lives against the tentacles of that lone Aircar splashed with crimson—and all were flying a losing race with the Earth, which was still being forced outward from the Moon!

Chapter 11: *Escape—and Dalis' Laughter*

But Sarka was not to be so easily beaten. There still remained an infinite number of possible changes of speed by manipulation of ovidum by vibration set up by the Beryls, without which this flight from the beginning would have been impossible. But for two hours, while the white robed men of Cleric fought against the car of the crimson slashes to prevent the capture of the daughter of their Spokesman—and died by hundreds in the grip of those grim tentacles—Sarka was forced to labor with the Beryls until perspiration bathed his whole body and his heart was heavy as he foresaw failure. And failure meant death or worse for Jaska.

But at the end of two hours, while the men of Cleric fought like men inspired against the Aircar of the crimson slashes, a cessation in the outward speed of the earth could be noted. At the end of three hours the body of Jaska, all this time fighting manfully to attain to landing place on the Earth, was at last bulking larger; but the tentacles of the Aircar were groping after her, reaching for her, striving to catch

and clasp her to her death.

The two Sarkas watched and prayed while the might of the Beryls, traveling at top speed, fought against the force of whatever was used by the Moon-men to compel the Moon to withdraw. Still the men of Cleric fought that single car, and died by hundreds in the fighting. White robed figures which became shriveled and black in the grip of those tentacles.

Countless of the men of Cleric deliberately cast themselves against those tentacles, throwing their lives away to give Jaska more leeway in her race for life.

"Will she make it, father?" queried Sarka in a whisper.

"If the courage and loyalty of her people stand for anything, she will make it," he replied.

On she came at top speed, and now through the micro-telescopes the Sarkas could see the agony of effort on her face, even through the smooth mask used by the people of Earth for flight in space where

there was no atmosphere. Courage was there, and the will of never-say-die; and Jaska, moreover, was coming back to the man she loved. In a nebulous sort of way Sarka realized this, for though these two had not mated there was a resonant inner sympathy between them which had rounded into an emotion of overpowering force since Jaska had proved to Sarka that she was to be trusted—that he had been something less than a faithful lover when he had mistrusted her, ever so little.

Closer now and closer, and at last the Aircar of the crimson splashes was drawing away, losing in the race for life. It was falling back, as though minded to turn about and race back for the Moon, now a ball in the sky, far away, the outlines of its craters growing dim and misty with distance. Now the men of Cleric, those who remained, were breaking contact with the Aircar, and forming a valiant rear-guard for the retreat of Jaska.

Throughout the Earth, as the Beryls fought with ever increasing speed to lower the rate of the earth's outward race from the Moon, was such a trembling,

such a vibration induced by conflicting, alien forces as there had not been even in that moment when back there in its orbit, the Earth could have either been kept within its orbit, or hurled outward into space at the touch of a finger.

Now Jaska, surrounded by her father's men, was almost close enough to touch the Earth.

She made it, weak and weary, and rested for a moment while her father's men steadied her. Then, thrusting them aside, with gestures bidding them return to their Gens, she lifted into the air again, and fled straight for the laboratory of Sarka.

She entered tiredly through the exit dome, and all but collapsed into the arms of Sarka. Gently he removed her helmet of the anti-gravitational ovoid, noting as she leaned against him the tumultuous beating of her heart. Then her gentle eyes opened and she whispered to Sarka.

"You trust me now?"

For answer he bent and kissed her softly on the lips—for the kiss, from the far distant time when the first baby was kissed by the first mother, had been the favored caress of mankind. Her face was transfigured as she read his answer in his eyes, and the touch of his lips. Then, remembering, fear flashed across her face. She straightened, and grasping Sarka by the hand, hurried with him into the observatory.

She took the seat in which Dalis had sat before he had gone out to the command of his Gens, studied for many minutes the battle in space between the two alien worlds.

"Dalis is winning," said the Elder Sarka quietly,
"apparently!"

"The qualification is a just one," said Jaska softly.

"'Apparently,' indeed! You will note now that, though men of the Gens of Dalis swarm all about the Aircars, and even clamber atop them, no more are dying in the grasp of those tentacles? Is Dalis arranging a treacherous truce with the Moon-men?"

"I have been wondering about that," said Sarka softly, "for it is my belief that nothing not conducive to his own selfish interests would have forced Dalis to leave this place and take command of his Gens, as I had first ordered, unless he had schemes planned of which father and I could know nothing. Now that I think of it, Jaska, how did Dalis know our secret code of fingers?"

Jaska started, and turned a blanched face to Sarka.

"*Did* he know?" she cried. "Did he? If he did that proves a suspicion that I have entertained since the first moment when Dalis swept into the fight, and I sensed that alien signals were being flashed back and forth!"

"Flashed back and forth!" ejaculated Sarka. "How do you mean? That Dalis was somehow able to communicate with the Moon-men in their own language, or through their own signals?"

"Why not? He knew our secret code, did he not? I never gave it to him, and I know that you did not. No,

Dalis has some means, never discovered or suspected by you Sarkas, whereby he is able to understand alien tongues and alien sign manuals!"

"That means," said Sarka the Elder in a dead voice, "that by forcing Dalis to go out at the head of his Gens...."

"We have," interrupted Sarka the Younger, "placed a new weapon of treason in his hands! Dalis, at the very moment of contact with the Aircars, loaded with Moon-men, broke in on their signals—they must have had some means of signalling one another—and communicated with them in their own way! Do you think it possible that, with all his Gens, he may go over to the Moon-men, form an alliance with them?"

For many moments no one dared to answer the question; yet, from what the Sarkas knew of him, it was not impossible at all. For Dalis was the master egotist always, and never overlooked opportunity to gain something for himself.

It was Jaska who broke the silence.

"Did you note carefully," she said, "those Aircars which were partially destroyed by our ray directors and atom-disintegrators?"

The Sarkas nodded.

"Did you note that no men, formed like our own, no creatures of any sort whatever, fell from the cars?"

Again the awesome silence, and the keen brains of the Sarkas wrestled with this vague hint of the uncanny.

"You mean, Jaska ... you mean...."

"That the occupants of Aircars are part of the cars, but—Beings of the Moon! That they are either metal monsters endowed with brains or tiny creatures irrevocably attached to the cars themselves!"

"But how," said Sarka at last, "are we to be sure? I can understand what Dalis might do if the Moon-men granted his wish for an alliance with them. It is easy to understand why his Gens would follow his lead, for

with the Moon forced outward from the Earth faster than his Gens could retreat, there is but one direction for his Gens to go—toward the Moon! They would go to the Moon as captives and trust the keen brain of Dalis to gain the mastery, sooner or later, over the Moon-men. And then...."

"And then—?" repeated Sarka the Elder.

"Then, Dalis has already been inspired by the speed with which those Aircars travel! You will remember that he did not take kindly to leaving the Earth and making his abode on some other planet! But why could he not do so, combine forces and knowledge with the people of that planet—and then return to Earth in alliance with them?—after we have depleted our forces by placing a large portion of our people on Mars and Venus and Saturn?"

"Sarka, my son," said Sarka's father, "before we continue with our flight to Mars, we must know the truth! We must somehow learn exactly what is going on on the Moon! If you could reach the Moon, alone, undetected, and bring back a report...."

For a moment he left it there, and the faces of all three were gray with worry and abysmal fear.

"I can't go bodily, father," said Sarka at last, "but you remember my secret exit dome, to the right of the observatory, from which I have never yet dared exit from this place for fear that it might cost me my life?"

Sarka the Elder nodded, while Jaska looked puzzled. Another evidence of the fact that Sarka had not always trusted her, for she knew nothing of a secret exit dome. Sarka's eyes, as he looked at Jaska, mutely asked her forgiveness, which she gave him with her smile.

"I remember, son, and now...?"

"Surely it is worth risking one's life to know what new menace looms over the children of men!"

"What is the use of this secret dome?" asked Jaska softly.

"It is merely an elaboration of the regular exit dome,

combined with certain phases of our atom-distintegrators, and the principle involved in the anti-gravitational ovoids. I step into the secret exit dome, garbed for flight Outside, and will myself to appear bodily in a certain place. It is instantaneous. I step into the dome, for example, and will myself to appear whole upon the Moon, and there I will appear!"

"You mean that during the period of transposition you are invisible?"

"Yes, invisible because non-existent, except for the essential elements of me, broken down by the secret exit dome, reassembled at the place willed in their entirety! I can't fly there, for a million eyes would see me approach! I must go in secret, as a spy, and wearing the clothing and insignia of a member of the Gens of Dalis!"

Silence in the observatory for a brief breathing space, and then Jaska spoke that speech out of the books of antiquity, which remains the classic expression of loyalty.

"Whithersoever thou goest, there will I go also!"

From the laboratory came a sudden burst of laughter, the laughter which all three recognized as the laughter of Dalis; but when they entered the place of the Revolving Beryl, there was no one there—and a feeling of dread, all encompassing, held them thralled for the space of several heart-beats. Dalis, they knew, was thousands of miles away, upon the Moon; yet here in the place of the Master Beryl they all three had just heard his sardonic laughter!

Chapter 12: *Ashes of the Moon*

Through the micro-telescopes it was possible to see what had happened after Dalis had assumed command of the Gens of Dalis. For even though the Moon, in spite of the speed of the Beryls, was being forced further and further from the Earth, the eyes of the micro-telescopes picked out and enlarged details to such an extent that the battle seemed to be transpiring under the eyes of the beholders.

A terrific jumble, in which Earthlings and Aircars were all tumbled together in mad chaos, a great mass of writhing, green-garbed figures. Infinite in number—in the midst of which were the gigantic Aircars, like monster beetles being beset by armies upon armies of ants.

Then, by the time Jaska had seated herself in the observatory atop the Himalayas, to watch what developed, the battle seemed to be over, and the Moon-men had won. For the huge cars swung around between the myriads of the Gens of Dalis, and seemed to be herding them toward the Moon, as though they

were prisoners.

Telepathically, Sarka and his father had been able to catch some hint of the thoughts of the Earthlings in the battle, and these thoughts had been tinged with doubt, fear and horror, so that even thus to receive them, by mental telepathy, was to feel the searing heat of their fear.

Now, in the instant when the battle in Space seemed to be over and the Gens of Dalis were prisoners, the thought waves were no more, and a brooding silence took their place. Dalis, the Sarkas knew, possessed the power to mask his thoughts, for it was a power possessed in common by all the scientists of Earth. But the common people of his Gens did not possess that power. However, for the moment Sarka had forgotten an all important something: that, when people were outside the roof of the world, they were subservient to the will of a common commander to whom they had sworn allegiance.

If, therefore, Dalis could mask his own thoughts from the brains of men, he could also mask the thoughts of

the people of his Gens, merely by willing it! So Sarka and his father and Jaska could not know whether the Gens of Dalis had gone over in a body with him, in a truce with the people of the Moon, or whether they were dual prisoners—of Dalis and of the Moon-men!

More than ever was it necessary for someone to somehow reach the Moon and make a thorough investigation, discover just what Dalis was doing, what mischief he was hatching.

The secret exit dome seemed to be the answer.

"You can manage without me, father?" asked Sarka.

The elder Sarka nodded.

"Of the other Spokesmen of Earth," went on Sarka, "I trust Gerd the most. Might I suggest that you bring him here, trust him in all details, and let him take my place wherever possible? Or, better still, keep Jaska here with you! I ... I may not be able to return! I'll try to find a way, but—we can always communicate telepathically. Jaska...."

"Jaska," said that young lady grimly, "goes with Sarka wherever Sarka goes!"

"But it may mean death! We can only guess at the cunning of the Moon dwellers! They may have been in secret communication with Dalis for centuries! Dalis, who somehow discovered our secret finger code, may also know of the secret exit dome, and the principle upon which it operates! If he does, he may know how to combat it! Perhaps that explains his laughter! Perhaps he heard and understood every word we spoke, hears and understands every word we speak now! Who knows? He may wait until I have passed through the secret exit dome, and then make it impossible for me to be reincarnated on the Moon—or elsewhere!"

"No matter," said Jaska softly, "wherever Sarka goes, there goes Jaska! It is useless to attempt to dissuade me, and it is time you learned that!"

In spite of himself Sarka smiled, and his father met his smile with a quizzical one of his own. Both men had the same thought.

"The eternal woman!" said Sarka the Elder. "No man has ever understood her—no man ever will! And all men are ruled by her!"

Sarka shrugged, and Jaska spoke again.

"Don't you think it is time we tried this new experiment?"

Sarka nodded, and his face was suddenly alight with the excitement which burned within him.

"First," he said, "we need accoutrements of the Gens of Dalis for two people!"

Jaska smiled.

"Forseeing that we might have need of such equipment, I had several complete outfits sent here when I took charge of the Gens of Dalis as its Spokesman!"

Two minutes later, arrayed in the green clothing of the House of Dalis, swathed in it from neck to toe,

wearing their belts and the masks which were necessary to life in space where there was no atmosphere, the whole topped by the gleaming helmets whose skull-pans held the infinitesimally small anti-gravitational ovoids, Jaska and Sarka entered the secret exit dome, side by-side.

On the breast and back of each showed the yellow stars of the Gens of Dalis. There was no hiding their identity otherwise, and if any of the Gens saw them, both would be immediately recognized—for Jaska had commanded the Gens, and Sarka was the world's greatest scientist known to every human being. But they planned on carrying out their investigations by stealth.

"Father," said Sarka, "when the inner door is closed upon us, you have but to press the button to the right of the door. Press it when the light beside it glows red, which will indicate that we have willed ourselves to go to a certain destination!"

The inner door closed upon Sarka and Jaska, and, hand in hand, side by side, their bodies glowing with

knowledge of warm, sympathetic contact, they waited for a miracle which had never before been attempted.

"Are you afraid, beloved?" queried Sarka.

"When I am with you," she said softly, "I have no fear."

"Then face the outer door, and will to go wherever I will to take you!"

Side by side, hand-in-hand still, they faced the outer door, and Sarka willed:

"Let us appear together in a deserted spot, within sight but unseen, of the Moon crater from which those Aircars were sent against us!"

A sudden blur, a cessation of all knowledge, and then....

Sarka and Jaska stood side by side in a desolate expanse surrounded by bleak and appalling mountains of grotesque shape, in a light that was weirdly, awesomely blue. Their feet were invisible,

deeply rooted in some soft, fine material which looked like snow.

After a swift glance around to see if anything lived or moved in this awful desolation, Sarka stooped and dipped up some of the fine stuff with his fingers, touched it to his lips.

The material seemed to be fine blue ashes and on his tongue it had a soapy savor. He peered at Jaska, whose eyes were glowing with excitement, whose lips were parted with anticipation, and instantly he opened a mental conversation with her.

::We must speak with each other telepathically, but do not speak with me until I have explained to you how to mask your thoughts from all persons save the one with whom you hold converse! First, I love you! Second, let us see if, searching the sky, we can find the Earth!::

In a few brief, highly technical words, Sarka told his beloved how to talk with him in the manner which he had never before explained to her. They had used

telepathy before, countless times, but they had not cared who heard—while now secrecy in all things was the prime essential for success, even for life.

When he had told her, and she replied, ::I understand perfectly, and it seems quite easy,:: they turned and surveyed the heavens, out of which, by this new miracle of the secret exit dome, they had dropped to the face of the Moon.

Away across the space between worlds, its transfiguration plainly visible to the two, they could make out and identify the world from which they had come. Save that they knew themselves standing on the Moon, they would have thought as far as appearances went, that the place where they had come was the Moon, many times enlarged. It seemed incredible that they had come so far in the twinkling of an eye; but that they had was proved by the fact of their physical presence.

::Look, Jaska!:: said Sarka suddenly. ::See how our Earth glows, as though it were afire inside!::

They stared at the great circular yellowish flame that he pointed out, and Sarka, always the scientist whose science was one of exactness, tried to estimate just where, on the Earth's surface, the glow was.

::Jaska,:: he said again, ::that glow comes out of the heart of the Gens area which Dalis ruled! And no one lives there, since Dalis' Gens flew out to do battle! That's why we did not know of it before we left! That glow, somehow, beloved, is the cause of the outward-from-the-Earth journey of the Moon! First we must locate the Moon-source of the glow, and render it incapable of further forcing itself away! For do you realize that, unless we do so, we will never again see home?::

Jaska said nothing, but her eyes were troubled for a moment. Then she smiled again.

::What care I if I become a prisoner on the Moon, if you are with me?::

Sarka was just now realizing the wonder of this raven-haired woman whom, knowing her for half a

century as he had, he had just known so little after all.

::If we seem in danger of discovery, Jaska,:: he said to her, ::drop down instantly into the ashes, for if we are discovered by Dalis.....::

He left it there and, with a deep intake of breath, started away for the nearest and highest hill. They desired to walk, yet found walking almost impossible, as they could not keep their feet on the ground save by the exercise of a really incredible effort of will. So, despairing of keeping their feet in contact with the ashes, they flew just above them, heading for the nearest weird-looking ridge.

In the strange light, which was oddly like moonlight in some painted desert of Earth, shapes were distorted and somehow menacing, colors were raw, almost bleeding—and distances that seemed but a step required hours to traverse.

Ever and anon, as they traveled they looked back up at the Earth which was their home. It still was visible,

though plainly smaller with distance, and for a time Sarka's heart misgave him; but he only clasped tighter the hand of Jaska and moved on.

They were just at the base of the first hill, which had now become a mountain of gloomy, forbidding aspect, when the first sound they had heard on the moon came to them. A sound that was a commingling of the laughter of Dalis, the barking of jackals of the olden times, the humming of a million Beryls revolving at top speed, and a strident buzzing such as neither had ever heard.

Had they been discovered? Was the sound a warning? They could not know; but as they stared at the crest of the hill, two long, snaky, waving things appeared above the crest, undulating, waving to and fro, as though questing for something. They crouched low in the white ashes at the base of the mountain, and waited, scarcely breathing.

Chapter 13: *The Lunar Cubes*

For a long time Sarka and Jaska remained still, like sentinels, listening to the strange discord which seemed to emanate from behind the hill at whose base they crouched.

::Look!:: said Sarka at last. ::There against the sky, beyond and between those two waving tentacles! Note that column of light, scarcely lighter than the light which surrounds it everywhere? It looks like a massive column just lighter than everything around it, yet so little lighter that you have to watch closely to see it at all?::

Jaska stared for all of a minute, before she thought back her answer.

::I see it,:: she said.

::Note now whether it goes, as it reaches outward into Space!::

Jaska followed the mighty height of the thing,

outward and outward, and then gasped.

::Sarka,:: she said, ::its end touches the Earth in the very heart of that strange glow we spoke about!::

::Exactly! And people of Earth know nothing about it, because it is invisible to them! It is only from Outside that the glow it makes against the Earth is visible! If we can divert its direction, or render it useless in any way, the Moon will no longer be thrust away by its force!::

A pause of indecision, then Sarka thought again:

::Let us go, Jaska! Keep behind me, right on my heels!::

Slowly, fighting against something that seemed determined to pull, or hurl, them outward from the surface of the Moon with each forward movement they made, they essayed the side of the hill, pausing at the end of what seemed like hours in a sort of hollow just large enough to mask their bodies and stared over its edge into one of the craters of the

Moon. Out of the depths of that crater came the discordant sounds, which now were almost deafening, and out of that crater too came the almost invisibly bluish column whose outer tip touched the Earth.

Right before them, so close that they all but rested in its shadow, was one of those monster Aircars, its tentacles moving to and fro as though wafted into motion by some vagrant breeze. But since neither Sarka nor Jaska could feel the breeze, Sarka knew that it was life which caused the waving motion of those tentacles of terror.

::Note,:: he said to Jaska, ::that there is a tiny trap-door in the bottom of the Aircar, and that the thing rests on a half-dozen of those tentacles!::

::I see,:: came Jaska's reply.

Jaska went on:

::Note the gleaming thing on the ground, right below the Aircar? I wonder what it is?::

They studied the thing there, which seemed to be a huge jewel of some sort that glittered balefully in the eery light of the Moon. It was, perhaps, twice the size of an average man's torso, and was almost exactly cubical in shape. As Sarka studied the thing, he sensed that feeling flowed out of it—that the cube, whatever it was, was alive!

He tore his glance away from it, and realized that he accomplished the feat with a distinct effort of will—as though the cube had willed to hold his gaze, knew he was there. His eyes, peering around the inner slope of the crater—which dipped over, some hundreds of feet down, and plunged downward to some unknown depth—noted a broad, flat stone, off to his right; and around the rim of the crater he counted a full hundred of the Aircars, all with their tentacles waving as if they belonged to sentient creatures.

Below each one, as he studied them and strained his eyes to make out details, he caught the baleful gleam of other cubes like the first he had seen. The Aircars, it seemed, were either sentinels, at the lip of the crater, or were the dwelling places of sentinels—and

the cubes were those sentinels!

It seemed absurd, but it came to Sarka in a flash that that was the answer, and his eyes came back to the first cube, because it was nearer and more easy to study.

::I will not be swayed by the will of the thing,:: Sarka told himself. ::Nor will I allow it to analyze me! Jaska, do you do likewise!::

Beside him, Jaska shivered. He turned to look at her. Her face was coldly white, and her eyes were big with terror and fascination as she stared at that first cube, resting so balefully there under the first Aircar.

He shook her, and she seemed to bring her eyes to his with a terrific, will-straining effort.

::Look at me!:: he told her, telepathically. ::Keep your eyes on me, for to look at the cube spells danger!::

But his own eyes went back to the thing, and he studied it closely. A cold chill raced through his body

as he noted that its gleam was becoming dull, fading slowly out. It had gleamed brightly at first, and now was losing its sheen, fading away to invisibility. He thought he should be able, regardless of gleam or color, to see its outline; but its outline, too, seemed to be becoming faint, indistinct.

Then, in a trice, it was gone, and a feeling of uneasiness, more compelling than he had ever known before, coursed through the soul of Sarka. Where had the cube gone? What was it? What was its purpose? He tore his eyes away from the spot where he had last seen it, and stared away to the shadow beneath the second nearest Aircar, where he had glimpsed another of the cubes.

The cube there, too, was fading out.

::Sarka! Sarka! Look!:: came to his brain the thoughts of Jaska.

Sarka turned and stared at her, and a feeling of fear for which he could not account at all took fast hold of him. The eyes of Jaska, wide and staring as they had

been when he commanded her to look away from the cube under the Aircar, were staring at that flat, table-like rock, off to his right.

There, almost in the center of the rock, a gleaming something was taking shape! Just a dull spot, in the center of the yellow glow; then the beginning of the outline of a cube. Then, all at once, the cube itself, gleaming and baleful!

Sarka gasped in terror. He had seen the cube vanish, its glow disappear, and now here it was, almost close enough to touch, on a rock beside him, gleaming and baleful as before! That it was the same cube he had seen under the first Aircar, he somehow knew without being told. That it was a sentient *thing* he also knew, for now there was no mistaking the fact that, but for the presence in the little hollow of Jaska and Sarka, the cube would not have moved.

Swift as light, Sarka's right hand darted to his belt, where his ray director should be nestled against his need of it. And with his first movement, the cube's brilliance vanished instantly, the cube disappeared,

and appeared again right before the face of Sarka, so close he could touch it! Yet he did not turn the ray director against it, nor did he extend his hand to touch the thing—because he was afraid to do so!

Even as the cube appeared before his eyes, thrice baleful and menacing in its close proximity, his eyes darted back to that broad flat rock, where the second gleaming cube now appeared!

::Great God, Jaska!:: he sent mentally, ::what does it mean?::

::These,:: she answered bravely back, ::are Moon-soldiers! And, unless we manage not to appear furtive, we are undone!::

Still Sarka made no move, while other gleaming cubes appeared on the flat rock. Five other cubes appeared beside the first, at the rim of the hollow which held the forms of Jaska and Sarka. The cubes were closing on them, oddly like a squad of Earthlings in the olden times, advancing by rushes against an entrenched enemy!

The buzzing sound which they had first heard now seemed accentuated, but, instead of being outside of the listeners, seemed inside them, hammering against their very brains! Messages were being sent to them, or passed back and forth between and among the cube-men about them—and they hadn't the slightest idea how to make answer, know whether an answer was expected of them, or what the cube-men thought about them!

Since there was nothing else to do, they lay there, hands clasped, as children in the dark clasp hands, and waited for what might transpire.

Suddenly the discord from the inside of the crater ceased, and all was still, while it came to Sarka that the cube-men who stood before him were in grim communication with something invisible to Sarka and Jaska, somebody, perhaps, deep in the bowels of the Moon, over inside the crater.

They knew, those two, that the cube-soldiers were reporting their presence, and asking instructions; that the Moon had gone silent to listen, and that within a

few moments their fate would be decided. What should they do?

In his hand Sarka held his ray director, with which he knew he could blast one or all of the cubes into nothingness. But still he held his hand, made no move.

Something, however, had to be done, for the discord was starting again, growing in volume. It made Sarka think, oddly enough, of a deaf mute fighting for speech! Then came the first intelligible sound....

A burst, from the depths of the crater, of sardonic laughter!

::Dalis!:: said Sarka, and moved. While Sarka moved, Jaska held fast to his arm. Casting her fear to the winds, furious because of the laughter of Dalis, Sarka thrust his ray director back into his belt and stood upright.

Bending over he seized the first of the gleaming cubes and hurled it over the edge of the crater, saw it start

plummeting down. But even before it fell out of sight within the crater its gleam had dulled until it was almost impossible to see the thing. Racing as though racing against time, Sarka caught up cube after cube and hurled them all after the first.

Out of the crater there came no sound of heavy objects striking, though Sarka felt there should have, for the cubes were almost as heavy as a man.

Then his hair almost stood on end under his helmet, for under that first Aircar, where he had first seen it, the initial cube was again gleaming into life!

The thing had dissolved while being hurled over the rim, and reformed in its proper place, its station as silent sentinel under the Aircar!

These cubes then, were indeed sentinels—sentinels impossible to injure. Though no force had been used against Sarka and Jaska, Sarka had the feeling that they were powerless, and that here on the edge of a crater of the Moon awful forces were being mustered against them. Mustered slowly, sluggishly, yet surely,

as though the mentality which mustered them knew them helpless, and that there was no need to hurry!

As for Jaska, she merely clung to Sarka and waited—trusting him no matter what might transpire.

On a blind chance, Sarka brought out his ray director again, turned its muzzle toward that invisibly-blue column, pressed with his fingers, moving the director back and forth.

Instantly the blue column seemed to break short off, while the broken upper portion started racing outward toward the Earth. Sarka watched it, and noted that the yellowish glow on the Earth, even as he watched, was fading out—disappearing!

::If the ray will smash the blue column, Jaska,:: he said, ::it will also destroy its source! Come! We will go look for it!::

And, holding her hand tightly, he rose to his feet and strode boldly down the inner slope of the vast crater.

Chapter 14: *The Crater Gnomes*

It seemed to Sarka, as he moved down the inner slope of the crater, that the cubes were somehow making sport of him, laughing at him, though no hint of laughter or anything resembling laughter emanated from them.

But, shutting his lips grimly, holding fast to Jaska's hand, he proceeded on, reached the lower portion of the inner slope, where it dropped off into a seeming black abyss, and dropped, keeping to a safe speed because of the fact that both he and Jaska were attired for movement in the air—though their manner of aerial transportation could scarcely be called flying.

The anti-gravitational ovoids simply rendered ineffectual the law of gravity.

Down they dropped, endlessly it seemed, while all about them, growing gradually, a bluish glow began to make itself manifest. Sarka turned and looked at the face of Jaska and noted that it—all her being—was

glowing with this strange radiance.

He smiled at her, and she smiled back.

Looking down now, to what seemed still a vast depth, they could see figures moving, tiny, almost infinitesimal, about a great circular cone, out of the depths of which came that strange bluish column whose outer tip touched the Earth.

Some inner sense warned Sarka not to touch that column, or to permit Jaska to do so. They dropped down beside it, while Sarka, for no reason that he could assign, once more took his ray director in his free hand and held it in readiness. It seemed so tiny and futile—so foolish for two people, one of them a woman—to go into the very heart of an alien world, against an unknown enemy, armed with such a tiny weapon. Two people against unguessed myriads, whose very nature was an enigma, even to Sarka.

Closer now appeared the bottom of the crater, whose floor seemed to be covered with something that looked like blue sand, or rock. From this bluish

substance the glow which bathed the two Earthlings seemed to emanate.

The funnel of the crater had now given away to the immensities of space, in all directions, and the cold of outside was being replaced by a warmth which promised soon to be even uncomfortable.

Then, without a jar, the two landed at the bottom of the crater, side by side, close enough almost to that great cone to touch it. Out of the cone came that bluish column, to shoot up through the funnel down which the two had lightly dropped ... and the motion of the—whatever it was—was accompanied by a muted moaning sound, like that of a distant waterfall.

They paused there, in amazement, taking stock of their surroundings. Huge tunnels, whose roofs were lost to invisibility in the bluish haze, whose extremities could only be guessed at, reached off in all directions. As far as the two could tell they were the only living souls within the crater, though both knew better.

Sarka had the feeling, and he knew Jaska shared it with him, that innumerable eyes were studying them, innumerable intellects were cataloguing them. And somehow he sensed the presence, somewhere near, of the traitor Dalis!

Then that discordant sound again, breaking so swiftly that it fell upon the eardrums of Sarka and Jaska like the crack of doom. Out of the many tunnels, from all directions, came hordes of beings which would have made the nightmares of Paracelsus—first of the scientists of Earth—pale to insignificance.

Paracelsus had written and illustrated his nightmares. Had hinted of strange acts of flesh-grafting—as the grafting of legs on the head of man. He had spoken, and written about, ghastly operations, from which men came forth as part men, part spiders; part men, part scorpions, dogs, cats, crocodiles....

Sarka thought, as his mind went back to those ancient books of his people in which still remained vestiges of the theories of Paracelsus, that somehow, in his dreams, Paracelsus must have visited the craters of

the Moon.

These people ... if they could be called people....

They had heads like the heads of Earthlings, broad-domed of brow, lacking eyelashes or lids, so that their eyes were perpetually staring. They possessed no bodies at all, and their legs, thin and attenuated to the size of the wrists of average men, seemed to support the massive heads with difficulty!

From all directions they came, looking like spiders such as Sarka the First had described to Sarka, when Sarka had been a mere boy. They came on the floor, out of the tunnels; they dropped from the walls of the tunnels, and down from the invisible roofs, landing on the floor as lightly as feathers—and all converged on Jaska and Sarka.

They seemed to have no fear at all, but only a vast curiosity.

Closer and closer they came.

Jaska's grip tightened on the hand of Sarka, for one of the creatures, with a spiderish leap, had jumped upon her, fastening its legs in her tight-fitting costume, where he hung, his face within an inch or two of hers. His lidless eyes, unblinking, stared deeply into hers.

Others jumped up beside the first, and still others clambered over Sarka, until both Sarka and Jaska were covered by them like beetles attacked by ants. But these strange gnomelike creatures, who did not fear these strangers, apparently meant them no harm.

Then, after a thorough scrutiny, began the strangest talking Sarka had ever heard. The crater-Gnomes seemed to communicate by making strange clucking sounds with their tongues, sounds which were unmusical and discordant, and which, as the Gnomes who stood back from them, because already the two were covered until no more could cling to Jaska or Sarka, joined in the speech—mounted in the cavern to a vast crescendo of sound.

Sarka knew then that this was the sound which had come out to them while they crouched at the crater

rim. These were people of the Moon: but if these were Moon-men, what, or who, were those gleaming cubes?

::Stand perfectly still,:: Sarka mentally admonished Jaska, ::they apparently mean us no harm!::

He had not spoken aloud, had not allowed his thought to reach any but Jaska; yet instantly the discordant clucking ceased, and the Gnomes were quiet, as though they politely listened to someone who had interrupted them, yet whose interruption they resented, or were curious about.

Wondering how the creature would regard his action, Sarka reached forth and plucked away the first Gnome which had jumped upon Jaska, and placed him gently on the ground. The thing merely stared at Sarka with his lidless eyes, as though wondering at Sarka's meaning. Then his lips, which were triangular, rather than straight as those of Earthlings, began again that strange clucking.

Immediately the Gnomes which clung to Jaska and

Sarka dropped away, and scuttled into the midst of the myriads that stood and watched. They did not understand the speech of these Earthlings, but they were unusually clever in comprehending the meaning of gestures.

::Hold fast to me, Jaska,:: thought Sarka toward her—and wondered anew as the Gnomes instantly ceased their clucking sounds—::for I am going to try an experiment.::

Holding her hand still, he turned and strode straight toward the huge cone out of which rose the bluish column.

Instantly the Gnomes broke into a frightful clucking of tongues, a sound that mounted to ear-drum-breaking intensity, and in a trice, climbing over one another to get into position, they moved in between Sarka and the cone. So eager were they to bar his further progress that they stood atop one another, until the depth of them was as tall as Sarka standing upright.

Yet, though they plainly said to Sarka: "You must not

approach the cone," they did not seem to be angry with their visitors, but only curious. Sarka looked at Jaska, noted how wanly she smiled.

Then he turned, and headed for the nearest of the monster tunnels.

Instantly he detected a surprising eagerness in the renewed clucking of tongues, while the Gnomes raced ahead, behind, all about the two, capering like pet animals, showing these strangers the way into the tunnel.

As they entered it, Sarka tried to discover whence came the bluish glow. The floor seemed to be of bluish sandstone, though its color, too, might have been caused by the glow. It was warm, too, so warm that perspiration was breaking out on the cheeks of Sarka.

Whence came the glow? Apparently from the very walls of the tunnel, or its roof; but surely from somewhere, surely from some secret place, whence it was diffused all over.

::And Jaska,:: said Sarka, ::the Moon, according to my father's researches, is literally honeycombed with craters like this one!::

Again, as he thought, that strange, sudden cessation of the clucking of the Gnomes. Whither were they leading them? It was plain to be seen that the Gnomes were heading for some destination, almost herding Sarka and Jaska toward it. Capering creatures, who behaved witlessly, yet were far from witless. If Sarka were not sadly mistaken, these were Moon-men—and women, too, perhaps, since he could not tell the sex of them—and those gleaming cubes were their outer guards, perhaps slaves.

If the cubes were really of metal—they had felt warm to Sarka's touch—then these Moon-men had gone further in science than Earthlings, as they had imbued at least some metals, or stones, with intelligence sufficiently advanced for them to perform actions independently of their masters' wills.

Sarka, too, was remembering another thing: that he had touched one of these Gnomes, to remove it from

Jaska—and had felt a distinct shock that was patently electrical!

The bluish glow was increasing, becoming more soft and mellow, shading gradually into golden, as they advanced—shading still as they preceded until it was almost white, almost blinding, in its radiance.

Then, of a sudden, the clucking of the Gnomes ended, and the creatures ceased their capering, fell into something that might have been an ordered military formation, and with Jaska and Sarka in the midst of them, moved straight toward a broad expanse of the tunnel wall, in the face of which appeared three long lines, deeply cut in the shape of a triangle.

The Gnome who had first leaped upon Jaska advanced to the wall, paused with his face almost against the lower line of the triangle, and remained there, intently staring, while the other Gnomes remained mute and unmoving.

Stronger and stronger appeared the blinding light. Slowly the inner portion of the triangle began to give

inward, like a door. And out of the opening came that blinding radiance.

As the triangular door stood entirely open, Sarka and Jaska stood in thunderstruck silence, staring like people bereft of their senses. For there, standing in the opening, the now white radiance itself a mantle to cover her, was a woman, unclothed save for the radiance, who might have been of the Earth, save that she was more beautiful than any woman of Earth.

Beside her the radiant beauty of Jaska paled, became wan and sickly.

But Sarka noted immediately her eyes, whose depths bewildered, amazed him. For in them he could see no expression, no feeling, but only abysmal cruelty. That she was Sarka's master, and Jaska's master, and master of all these Gnomes, became instantly apparent for telepathically she addressed Sarka.

::I am busy now. The Moon-people will hold you prisoners in the Place of the Blue light, until I am ready to give you to the Cone!::

Chapter 15: *The Place of the Blue Light*

So the Gnomes were Moon-people, masters of the Moon cubes! And people and cubes were ruled by a woman who resembled a woman of Earth!

The Gnomes took them back the way they had come.

Where, Sarka wondered, were the people of the Gens of Dalis? And where was Dalis himself! Sarka was sure that, in those first discords which had come out of the crater, he had heard at least a hint of the laughter of Dalis.

And this woman clothed in radiance—who was she? And what? That she was a creature of the Moon, and yet resembled in all ways a woman of Earth, save that she was more beautiful than any woman Sarka had ever seen, seemed almost impossible to believe. Yet he had seen her. So had Jaska, and as Sarka and Jaska, with the capering Gnomes still about them, were led away to a fate at which they could only guess, Sarka wondered at Jaska's silence and at the strange lack of expression on her face.

He pressed her hand, but somehow she failed to return the pressure, mystifying more than ever. This sudden coldness was not like Jaska.

Back they went through the vast cavern where the cone of the bluish column still moaned and murmured. Sarka moved as close to the cone as the Gnomes would permit, and peered up along the mighty length of the column. At its tip was still the Earth, like a star viewed from the bottom of a deep well.

Smaller, too, it seemed, which proved that Sarka's breaking of the blue column had been but momentary, that the column had almost instantly regained its contact with the Earth. What was its source, what the composition of the column?

At the moment there could be no answer to the question. Now the Gnomes were escorting them into another tunnel, whose glow was even bluer than that which the two had experienced in the other tunnels. And the deeper they penetrated, the more distant from the cavern of the Cone, the deeper in color

became that light.

Finally the Gnome who had mentally asked permission of the Radiant Woman to show her Jaska and Sarka passed before another expanse of wall, identical in appearance with that of the wall of the triangle from which the Radiant Woman had appeared.

This time the Gnome managed ingress by a strange clucking sound, with his triangular lips held close to the base-line of the triangle.

Now the door swung open; but the radiance which now came out was not clear white, as in the case of the outer door, but deeply, coldly blue. For the first time the Gnomes used force with their prisoners, thus proving to them that they were indeed prisoners. Their tiny feet caught at Sarka and at Jaska, and forced them through the door, which swung shut behind them.

Sarka looked at Jaska who, in this strange new light, had taken on the color of indigo, and smiled at her.

She did not return his smile, but her eyes looked deeply, somewhat sorrowfully, into his. As though she asked him a question he could not understand, to which he could therefore give no answer.

Sarka was now conscious of the fact that the heat of their prison-house—whose character they did not as yet know—was becoming almost unbearable. They were alone, too, for the Gnomes had not entered the door of triangle. Sarka partially removed his life mask, and testing the atmosphere of the place, found it capable of being breathed without the mask. He signalled mentally to Jaska to remove her mask, and when the girl had done so he took her in his arms and kissed her on the lips.

She accepted his caress, but did not return it, and her eyes still peered deeply into his.

::Well, beloved,:: he said. ::I am terribly sorry. But I did not want you to come because I was afraid that something of this sort would happen.::

She did not answer.

::What is it, Jaska?:: he said at last.

::What did you think of that woman?:: she asked softly.

::Beautiful!:: he said enthusiastically. ::Fearfully beautiful! But did you see her eyes? She had no more mercy in her heart than if she were made of stone! And she hated us both the moment she saw us!::

::And you, Sarka—did you hate her, too?::

Sarka stared at her, not comprehending.

::I feel,:: he said, ::that if we are ever to escape her, we must kill her, or render her incapable of retaining us!::

Then, of her own accord, Jaska placed her arms around Sarka, and gave him her lips. Her new behavior was as incomprehensible to Sarka as her former enigmatic expression had been. Wise in the ways of science was Sarka, but he knew nothing of women!

Now hand in hand again, they began a survey of their prison house. The bluish glow was unbearable to the eyes, and tears came unbidden and ran down the cheeks of the prisoners. In a minute or two, perspiration was literally bathing the bodies of the two. After a questioning exchange of glances, Sarka swiftly divested himself of his costume, stripping down to the gray toga of Earth's manhood. With a shrug, Jaska removed her clothing to her own toga, and the two suits Sarka carried under his arm.

They started ahead, exploring, then sprang back with a cry of fright. Sarka did not know whether it was Jaska or himself who had cried out; for just as they moved forward, a rent opened in the floor at their feet, and their eyes for a moment—they could stand no longer—peered into a bluely flaming abyss which, save for the color, reminded Sarka of the word pictures of Hell he had read in Earth's books of antiquity!

As the two stepped back, the rent in the floor closed instantly. Sarka had noted where the end of it had been, and started to detour, his eyes on the floor.

Over to his left the blue glowing wall reached up to invisible immensity. But as he would have passed along the wall, the rent opened again, effectually barring his way.

Beyond the rent he could see a vast continuation of the cavern, and he felt that, could they only pass the rent, they might reach a place where the heat was not so unbearable, and they could stay and talk in comfort.

Releasing Jaska, he stepped back and prepared to leap the spot where the rent had been. High he jumped, and far, surprised at the length of his own leap. He landed lightly, far beyond the area where the rent had been, and even as he landed, a rent opened again at his feet, thus effectually barring further progress!

::It could just as easily,:: he told himself, ::have opened under my feet, and dropped me into the abyss!::

From behind him came the sudden sound of

screaming. He whirled to look back, to see Jaska standing there, arms outstretched toward him, her eyes wide with fear and horror, and as he stood watching, she raced to him, unmindful of abysses that might open under her feet, and flung herself into his arms.

::Come back!:: she moaned. ::Come back! Don't you see? *They* don't wish you to explore further! We are in their power, and must simply await their pleasure, whoever or whatever they are! They see all we do!::

So they turned back, and stood against the door which held them prisoners; and the heat of the place seemed to enter into them, to gnaw at their very vitals. After a time Sarka found himself almost tearing at his throat, fighting for breath.

Gasping, the tears bathing their cheeks until even their tears and their perspiration would flow no more, they huddled now just inside the massive stone door, arms about each other, and almost prayed for death. Sarka at least prayed for death for both of them; but Jaska prayed for a way of deliverance, prayed that

herself and Sarka might somehow win free, and be together again.

Sarka, who knew little of women, marveled at the grandeur of her courage, and wondered that he really knew this radiant woman so little. He compared her in his mind with the unclothed woman who had ordered them here as prisoners, and it came to him that Jaska was all perfection, all tender womanhood, while the Radiant Woman was a monster, without soul or compassion—a creature of horror who mocked God with her outward seeming of perfection.

Jaska read his thoughts, and smiled wanly to herself, and Sarka wondered how, suffering as he knew she must be suffering, she could find the courage to smile.

Then, for a time, the two became comatose, mastered by the blue heat, and in dreamlike imaginings wandered in strange fields which could only, to these two, have been racial memories, since neither had ever seen such fields. There were cool streams, all a-murmur, and breezes which cooled their sun-tanned cheeks. Water touched their tongues, and cooled their

whole bodies as they gratefully imbibed it.

In their wanderings, in which Sarka was a faun and Jaska a nymph, they talked together in a language which only these two comprehended—a language which dealt in figures of speech, a language which depended upon handclasps for periods, glances of the eyes for commas, and the singing of their hearts for complete understanding.

Then a cool breeze, cool by comparison, caressed their pain-distorted cheeks, and the Gnomes came in, found them lying there, and clucked endlessly as though wondering what to do with them.

From hand to tiny hand, their feet serving as hands, the Gnomes passed garments—garments of the Gens of Dalis, and clothed again the two whom the Place of the Blue Light had all but slain. Of that ghastly experiment Sarka retained but one real memory....

That bluish light, in the midst of the abyss, shifting and swaying like blue serpents swimming in Hades ... that bluish light of the Cone, which he had broken up

for a brief moment by the use of his ray director. Was this bluish light in the abyss the source of the light in the Cone? If one were to destroy it at its source....

The two regained consciousness completely as the triangular door closed behind Sarka and Jaska and the Gnomes, and they were taken into the refreshing coolness of the tunnel, led back again in the direction of the room where they had seen the Radiant Woman. Both Jaska and Sarka noticed that they were clothed in new clothing, and a shy blush tinged the cheeks of Jaska as her eyes met those of Sarka.

This time they entered the vast chamber of radiance behind the first triangular door, and were forced to their knees to do obeisance to the Radiant Woman, who sat on a gleaming yellow stone for dais! The guards who forced Sarka and Jaska to their knees, were clothed in the green of the Gens of Dalis, and Dalis himself, his face stern, but bearing no sign of recognition of these two, stood at the right hand of the Radiant Woman!

::You come to us as spies,:: the thought of the Radiant

Woman impinged upon the brains of Sarka and of Jaska, ::and as spies you should be given to the Cone. But if you swear eternal allegiance to me, to obey me in all things, to forego your allegiance to Earth, your lives will be spared! What say you?::

Boldly Sarka stared into the almost opaque eyes of the woman. Then his glance went to the face of Dalis.

"What," he asked boldly, in the language of Earth, "does the traitor Dalis say?"

"I have sworn allegiance to Luar, who addresses you, and am her ally in all things! I have but one addition to make to what she says: Jaska belongs to me!"

The sudden leering grin of Dalis was hideous.

Sarka peered at Jaska, framing his answer. But Jaska spoke first.

"For myself, O Dalis," she said swiftly, "I can answer in but one way. Return me to the Place of the Blue Light, and forget me there!"

Sarka smiled, while his heart leaped with joy.

::And I, O Luar,:: he said mentally to the Radiant Woman, ::prefer death with Jaska, at the Place of the Blue Light, than life as a traitor to the world of my nativity!::

Instantly Luar began the clucking sound which was the language of the Gnomes, at the same time allowing her thoughts as she spoke to impress themselves upon the brains of the prisoners.

::Take them away! Take them to the Cavern of the Cone, and when they have suffered as much as such inferior beings are capable of suffering, thrust them into the base of the Cone!::

Chapter 16: *Cavern of the Cone*

The Gnomes had been bidden to take the prisoners to the Cavern of the Cone, but to the surprise of Sarka and Jaska, they were taken back to the Place of the Blue Light! This time the Gnomes entered the place with them, closing and securing the door behind them.

But the Place of the Blue Light had changed!

Now it had no floor of blue, as it had had before, but only a corridor perhaps wide enough to allow the passage of four grown men, walking side by side, while the abyss of which the two had got but the merest hint through the opening and closing rents filled all the center of the place!

The Gnomes seemed impervious to the unendurable heat, and these, moving together, one behind the other, one beside the other, one atop the other, formed a living wall between Sarka and Jaska and the rim of the flaming blue abyss, to protect them from the heat.

Yet through the bodies of this living wall of Gnomes, a wall which was higher than the heads of Sarka and Jaska, the heat forced its way to the prisoners, and burned them anew with its agony.

To what dread rendezvous were they going? Where, save for the few guards at the house of Luar, were the people of the Gens of Dalis? Sarka felt, somehow, that the answers to all these questions would soon be made manifest, and a feeling of exaltation he could not explain was possessing him as he advanced. Around the corridor, whose one side was the wall reaching up to invisibility, whose other side dropped off into the abyss, the Gnomes herded the prisoners.

The leader of the Gnomes was again the Gnome who had first leaped upon Jaska to examine her curiously. Now, watching the lidless eyes of this being, Sarka fancied he could detect a hint of some expression. The Gnome was excited at some prospect, some climax which they were approaching. What? On and on they moved. The blue flames from the abyss, roaring in a way that neither of the prisoners had ever experienced, reached upward in searing tongues

toward the invisible roof of this place.

Then, when they had progressed far from the door of entry, Sarka gasped at a new manifestation. Out of the abyss, some distance ahead, came a gleaming thing, something that had apparently evolved itself out of the flames of the abyss. Blue of color it was, because of the flames from the pit; but Sarka recognized it with a start which he could not suppress nor understand.

It was one of those cubes, such as he and Jaska had seen at the lip of the Moon-crater! As they approached, guided by the Gnomes, other cubes appeared out of the abyss, others in numbers swiftly augmented, until a veritable battalion of them had marshalled itself, there at the lip of the abyss.

Straight toward these cubes the Gnomes led Sarka and Jaska, and when they had reached the center of the group, they halted, forming a circle, still a wall to mask the prisoners from the heat of the abyss. The leader of the Gnomes stopped with his face, his lidless eyes, close to one of the cubes.

For a moment he paused thus, and Sarka felt sure that somehow the Gnome was holding thought converse with the cube; but, try as he might, he could find no meaning in the weird conversation for himself. It was oddly like listening to a conversation in a code beyond his knowledge.

Then the Gnome turned back to Sarka and Jaska. By a pressure of tiny feet, he tried to indicate that Sarka and Jaska should unclasp their hands. But they only clung the tighter, and now threw their arms about each other.

The Gnome desisted, much to the joy of the lovers, while Sarka studied the cubes, wondering what their mission was with Jaska and himself.

Slowly, together, the cubes began to lose their bluish glow, their cube shape—to vanish utterly.

In a trice, still locked in each other's arms, Sarka and Jaska saw the Gnomes through what appeared to be an even bluer haze. Besides, the heat of the abyss no longer tortured them, and their bodies were cooling

in a way that was unbelievably refreshing.

"What is it, beloved?" whispered Jaska. "What is it?"

Sarka stared at the Gnomes, now in retreat, capering as they had first capered when the two had fallen into their hands, toward the door by which all had entered. Mystified, Sarka put forth his hand. It came in contact with something solid, and oddly warm, which stirred an instantly responsive chord in the brain of Sarka.

This feeling was the same as he experienced when he had lifted those cubes and hurled them into the crater—where they had dissolved in falling, and instantly reappeared, each under its own Aircar!

::Jaska!:: he explained. ::Jaska! The cubes have dissolved themselves, and have reformed in the shape of a globe, as a protective covering about us, to protect us from the heat of the abyss! Apparently we are not to be killed at once! These cubes are slaves of the Gnomes, of whom Luar is ruler!::

They were indeed locked inside a globe, a globe whose integral parts were the cubes of their acquaintance; and the atmosphere of the interior was not uncomfortable, but otherwise. Sarka and Jaska were feeling normal for the first time since they had landed on the Moon. But what was the meaning of this strange imprisonment?

They were soon to know!

For the globe which enclosed them, moved to the edge of the flaming abyss, and dropped into the bluish glow! It did not drop heavily, like a falling object on Earth, but rather floated downward, right into the heart of the flames. At this new manifestation of the strangeness of science on the Moon, Sarka was at once all scientist himself, striving to find adequate answers for things which, from cause to effect, were entirely new to him. With Jaska still clasped close against him, he seated himself in the base of the globe and studied the area through which they were passing.

Blue flames which seemed to be born somewhere, an

infinite distance below them; blue flames which he knew to be the element that, shot outward from the great cone, had forced the Moon away from the Earth.

No sound of the roaring flames came through the globe, but every movement of them was visible.

Sarka turned and peered through the bottom of the globe; but all he could see below were the flames, a molten indigo lake of them. Now, as they floated downward, the glow was giving away to lighter blue, to white, almost pure white, like the radiance which covered Luar like a mantle.

Sarka felt himself on the eve of vast important discoveries, and the scientist in him made him, for the moment, almost forget the woman at his side. Jaska, unbothered about anything, now that Sarka was at her side, regarded his expression of deep concentration with a tolerant smile.

Whiter now was the light, and faster fell the globe which held the two.

The color of the globe, now fallen below the area of blue, had taken on, chameleonlike, the color of the white flames that bathed it.

Then, apparently right in the center of a lake of white flames, though Sarka could see no solid place on which the globe had landed, the globe came to rest.

Now everything was plain to see, and Sarka studied his surroundings with new interest. He felt a mounting sensation of scalp-prickling horror.

For, scattered throughout the lake of white flames, in all directions, as far as the eye could reach—standing alone, suffering untold agonies, from the expressions on their faces—were people of the Gens of Dalis!

No longer were they clothed in green and wearing on breast and back the yellow stars of their Gens. Now they were nude as they had come into the world and standing there, each was holding out hands in horror, to hold back myriads of the Gnomes, who would have forced them to submerge themselves in the white flames of the lake!

Was the Gens of Dalis being burned alive? What was the meaning of this?

For a moment, filled with horror, Sarka looked away from the spectacle. Off to his right, as he sat, he noted that the flames, which here seemed lighter than they had in high levels, were converging on a single spot toward the side of the lake of white flames—as smoke converges on the base of a chimney leading outward to the air!

He knew as he stared that he was gazing at the spot where the bluish column of the cone was born!

Shaking his head, he turned back to the mighty spectacle of this horrible thing that was being done to the people of the Gens of Dalis.

In his brain there suddenly crashed a thought whose source he could only guess at, whose meaning mystified him more than anything yet experienced. The thought might have emanated from Luar, or from Dalis. But the more he thought of the matter, the more he thought how the phrasing of the thought was

like the telepathy of Sarka the Second, now thousands of miles away, upon the Earth. And this was the thought:

::If they fight the flames, the flames will destroy them! If they go into them freely, voluntarily, they will be rendered immune to heat and to cold, to life and to death. But it is better that they die, for Earth's sake!::

What did it mean?

Sarka thought of the radiant white light which perpetually bathed the person of Luar, and thought that he had somehow been given a hint of its source. If the Gens of Dalis were voluntarily bathed in the lake of white flames, would they become as Luar?

Somehow, though he knew that such bathing would save their lives, the idea filled him anew with horror. He found himself torn between two duties. If he sent his thought out there to the Gens of Dalis, people of Earth, his people, they would be saved, but might forever become allies of the people of the Moon. If Sarka did not tell them, they would die—and there

were millions of them.

But his science had always been a science of Life, and it still was.

::Enter the flames!:: he telepathically bade his people.

::Enter the flames!::

But they did not heed him, and for the first time the atmosphere of the interior of the globe seemed filled with savage, abysmal menace! Plain to Sarka was the meaning of that menace: The cubes which composed this globe were loyal to their masters, the masters to a mistress, Luar, and would countenance no meddling.

Likewise it was impossible, if the Gnomes willed it to the cubes, for Sarka to transmit his thoughts to the Gens of Dalis through the transparent walls of the globe!

They were prisoners, indeed, of Dalis and of Luar!

But could Sarka and Jaska turn their new-found

knowledge to their own use? Sarka was thinking back, back to one of the ancient tomes of his people. It spoke, someplace, of a man who had got trapped in the heart of a seething volcano, where the heat of it had cured him of his illnesses, made him whole again, given him new youth and freshness.

But since the cubes could forestall his transmission of thought, and perhaps could read and understand thoughts, how was he to tell Jaska? How show her that a way of deliverance had been given into their hands, if they only possessed the courage to use it!

Again came that thought, which Sarka recognized as the telepathy of his father:

::Courage! You will win, and Jaska with you!::

Thoughts could come in to them then, but could not go out. Or did it mean that the cubes, or the masters of the cubes, did not care if the prisoners received messages from outside, because they knew themselves capable of frustrating anything the prisoners planned? Perhaps. More than likely that

was it.

But, looking through the bottom of the globe, into the sea of white flames below, Sarka gripped more tightly his ray director, and tried to marshal the forces of his courage. There was surely some way of escape. Some way out of their strange predicament.

Chapter 17: *Casting the Die*

Somehow Sarka believed that this white radiance of the abyss held the secret of the omnipotence of Luar, if omnipotence she possessed. That she did seemed sure, else Dalis would not have been with her.

Besides, she had asked Sarka and Jaska to swear allegiance to her. Yes the secret was here, in the heart of the lake of white flames.

It might have been the Moon Fountain of Youth, or of omnipotence. There was no telling, unless Sarka tried an experiment.

His fury at Dalis now knew no bounds, and he was conscious of a desire, too poignant almost to be borne, in some way to circumvent the arch-traitor. For here in the craters of the Moon Dalis was working out a strange amplification of the scheme which he had, centuries before, proposed to Sarka the First. He was subjecting the people of his Gens to the white flames.

If they immersed themselves voluntarily, they became as Luar was, but still subservient to the will of Dalis—

and, in his hands, invincible instruments of war! Dalis had doubtless already been bathed in the flames.

Sarka was not sure, for in the home of Luar the white light was so blinding it would have been impossible to make sure that the white radiance clothed the others with Luar.

"That's it!" said Sarka to himself. "That's it! Dalis and those guards at the dais of Luar have already been subjected to the white flames! The rest who immerse themselves, voluntarily, come forth as Luar and Dalis! Who do not, die. Dalis' manner of forcing the survival of the fittest! His idea of the flood in grandfather's time, only now he causes his selection by flames instead of flood! He believes that only those worthy to survive, and to stand at his back in whatever he conceives to be his need, will guess the secret of the immersion. The others will die!"

What a terrible alternative, when Dalis could as easily have given the secret to all his people! Could have told them how to save themselves! But it was not Dalis' way. Here, in the beginning of what was to become a dual sovereignty of the Moon, Dalis had

already taken thought on the matter of over-population, and was destroying the many that the few—the strongest, most ruthless—might survive! Hundreds of thousands, millions of the Gens of Dalis, stood at the door of life, and did not know how to enter, merely because Dalis withheld the key! And, pausing in terror before the flames, they died, when a step and a plunge would have saved them all!

"If he lives to be a million, if he lives through everlasting life," said Sarka to himself, "and does penance through a thousand reincarnations, Dalis can never atone for this wholesale destruction of humanity! But I ... I wonder!"

Sarka realized the nicety of the revenge of Dalis upon Jaska and himself. Dalis had not given the secret to the prisoners, but by his use of the cubes, he had plunged them into the very heart of the horror, where they could see the suffering of the people of the Gens. Then, when they had seen and appreciated the horror of it all, they would follow the people of the Gens to death!

But Luar had spoken of thrusting them into the base of the Cone!

Then they were not for the flames after all! How could it be done? The globe composed of the cubes had but to transport the prisoners to the base of the Cone, press against that base, and open to let the prisoners free—and in the heart of the white-blue column they would be hurled outward from the Moon, into space. The mere prospect of such horror caused the perspiration to break forth anew on the body of Sarka.

But there might be a way.

"I wonder," he asked himself, "if the Earth people in *this* crater could read my thoughts in spite of their agonies, if I could get my thought to them through the globe? I wonder if, reading my thoughts, they would obey?"

Bit by bit, as parts of a puzzle fall into place, he made his plan, and his heart beat high with excitement. Jaska bent before him to look into his eyes, and he

knew that she was trying to read his face. She knew, wise Jaska, that this brilliant lover of hers was making a plan, and she believed in the sure success of it because it would be *his*!

She smiled at him, her courage high, and waited!

Holding the ray director between his body and that of Jaska, he took a terrible, ghastly chance. Dalis had known the secret sign manual of these two; but would the intelligence of the cubes comprehend it? He must take the chance, slender as it seemed. His free hand began to spell out, with all speed, the mad plan he had conceived.

[The white flames are harmless if one plunges into them voluntarily. Are you afraid to attempt it? No? Then unfasten your clothing, and have it so arranged that you can drop entirely out of it when I give you the signal, which will be a mere widening of the eyes, like this! You understand? We must go nude into the flames, so that they will bathe our whole bodies! But, when you slip out of your clothing, tear your anti-gravitational ovoid from the skull-pan of your helmet,

and hold it in your mouth! Then depend upon me, and have no fear!]

[I have no fear,] replied the fingers of Jaska. [I go to death with you if you wish—or to Life!]

Feeling the menace of the cubes almost gripping at his throat as he got into action, Sarka unfastened his own clothing, ripped the ovoid from his helmet, placed it in his mouth. Then, looking at Jaska, he gave her the signal.

Instantly, at her nod, he brought forth the ray director, pressed it with his fingers, directing its muzzle toward the curve of the globe, swinging it around in a circle, cutting out the bottom of the globe of cubes.

The action must have been one of untold surprise to the cubes which made up the globe, for before anything could be done to stay the hand of Sarka, his ray director had cut out the bottom of the globe, and Jaska and himself, divested now of all clothing, had fallen from the globe.

Unbearable heat slashed and tore at them. They still held hands, and when their feet touched upon something solid, they were gasping with the unbelievable heat; and it was ripping at their lungs like talons of white hot steel. But, pausing not at all, Sarka raced ahead with Jaska, and dived straight into the lake of white flames.

As he dived he directed his thoughts toward the people of the Gens who stood, undecided, dying by slow inches, on their little oases in the lake. And this was the thought, which was a command.

::Plunge into the flames! They will not hurt you!
Plunge in, and obey my commands, O people of the Gens of Dalis! I, Sarka, command that you obey me! Jaska, who commanded you at the will of Dalis, also commands. Gather with Jaska and me at the base of the Cone! You have but to follow the converging of the flames!::

Together the two plunged in, and it seemed all at once as though the fire had gone out of the white flames, for they were cool and soothing to the touch.

Sarka could feel new life being borne in him, could feel himself revitalized, exalted, lifted to the heights. He suddenly experienced the desire to run, and shout his joy for all to hear. But reason held him. Not thus easily would Luar and Dalis, the traitor, give over their designs against these two.

But in the heart of the flames, they dropped down, while they turned their faces toward the base of the Cone, or where they thought the base to be, even as Sarka gave another command to the now invisible people of the Gens of Dalis.

::Hold your ovoids in your mouths and follow! Obey my will!::

They dropped now to what seemed to be cool flagstones, while above them showed an orifice in a wall, into which those tongues of flame were darting. They paused there, side by side, their faces radiant, and looked back the way they had come.

Coming out of the white flames, like battalions on parade, were the people of the Gens of Dalis—scores

and hundreds of them, who had sensed and heeded the mental commands of Sarka. Like genii appearing out of the flames they came, to muster about Sarka and Jaska.

Then, when it seemed that no more were coming, Sarka turned to the base of the Cone, his face high shining with courage and confidence, and stepped straight into the flames that led into the Cone. Beside him came Jaska, while behind him came the people of the Gens of Dalis who dared to do as he had commanded.

They were sucked into the Cone like chips sucked into a whirlpool, and Sarka willed a last command as they entered:

::Quit the column at the lip of the crater, and muster about the Aircars!::

Chapter 18: *The People of Radiance*

The exaltation of Sarka knew no bounds, and looking into the eyes of Jaska, he knew she felt it, too. For her face was shining, and all of her, the wondrous shining brilliance of her, was bathed in the white radiance that mantled Luar. And now, since Jaska too knew that radiance, her beauty was greater even than that of Luar. Sarka thrilled anew at the glory of her.

But even as he stepped into the base of the Cone, he stepped out of the blue column at the lip of the Moon-crater. Swift as light, and swifter, had been the flight upward from the Cavern of the Cone; yet, so keen were his perceptions, he knew when he had passed through the chamber of the bluish glow, into which he and Jaska had first dropped upon arrival.

Now they were on the lip of the crater, and the people of the Gens who had followed him, were slipping out of the blue column, like insects out of a flame, and converging on the Aircars whose tentacles still waved as they had when Sarka had last seen them.

Sarka looked at these people in amazement. To him there was a divinity now about their nudeness which nudity never before had suggested to him. For the people shone, and there was something glorious in those divinely white bodies. They reminded Sarka of his people's books of antiquity, and his childhood's pictures of angels....

But the effect of those white flames!...

There was no explaining it. But Sarka felt that whatever he willed to do he could do; that whatever he wished for was his, whether it was his by right or no. He felt that he could move mountains, with only the aid of his hands. Looking at Jaska he conceived all sorts of new beauty in her, for she was the brightest, to him, of all the people who had passed through the lake of white flames, and been cleansed in their heat.

"No wonder Luar has mastered the Moon!" he cried to Jaska. "For when she was bathed in the white flames, her will is paramount!"

"But how, if she passes the people of the Gens of Dalis

through the flames, will she retain her sovereignty?"

"Because Dalis, too, has passed through, and his will is the will of the Gens! They will obey him, and he has sworn allegiance to Luar, or given some sort of oath of fealty!"

"How strange that but one person on the Moon has been bathed in the white flames!"

"How do we know," Sarka almost whispered it, "that she is, originally, of the Moon? Does she not look too much like our people, to be from another world entirely?"

"I do not know, but ... you mean ... you mean...?"

"I scarcely know; but Dalis would swear allegiance to no man, much less to a woman, unless he knew that man, or woman, far better than he has had opportunity, in a matter of hours only, to know Luar!"

He left it there then, as he strode boldly, with Jaska by his side, to the nearest of the Aircars.

As he approached the car, the gleam cube beneath it seemed to gleam brighter and brighter, as though it echoed the radiance of Sarka. Sarka knew, studying this phenomenon, that he possessed at least a hint of the secret of Luar's omnipotence. There had been a hint before, but by now its meaning was clearer. The white flames, out of the heart of the dying Moon, gave new life, exaltation, not only to the bodies but to the brains of those who passed through it, and with their brains quickened, they possessed such knowledge as men of Earth, for ages, had wished to possess.

Transmutation of metals ... the ability, at will, to endow the higher, more selective metals with intelligence ... and the ability to retain command of the intelligences thus endowed. This explained the power of Luar over the Gnomes, and the power of the Gnomes over the cubes—if they possessed that power.

But the Gnomes, what of them? What were they?

But for a space Sarka must await the answer to that question, for there was little time. Already he knew that the tale of his escape, and his taking over of a

portion of the Gens of Dalis, must have gone like wildfire through all the crater, and from this crater, perhaps, had been transmitted to all the craters of the Moon. All the craters....

That explained to him the absence from the lake of white flames, where he had seen so few, comparatively, of the people of Dalis' Gens. The Moon was honeycombed by such craters, and perhaps the white flame connected them all, made them all one. And Luar commanded all from her dais in this crater Sarka and his people were escaping. The millions of the Gens had been swallowed by the craters of the Moon, at command of Luar, acceded to by Dalis—and all over the Moon the very things which Sarka and Jaska had witnessed were taking place.

Even now, as Sarka raced for the Aircar, and Jaska with him, he could feel a backward pulling that was well-nigh invincible. Someone was willing him to return, willing the Gnomes to pursue him, willing the cubes to refuse obedience to him; but he laughed and stepped to the Aircar, passing by the nearest writhing tentacle as though he knew it possessed no power to

harm him. The tentacle swept aside, and did not try to bar him, while he sent his will crashing against that brightly gleaming cube. "Into the Aircar! We enter with you!"

The cube vanished instantly, and it seemed to Sarka that invisible hands caught at his feet, lifting him up through the trap-door in the belly of the Aircar, up and inside. The door swung shut, and in the forward end of the vast Aircar gleamed the cube which had obeyed his command!

Sarka sent one thought careening outward from the Aircar, a command to the cubes which stood watch beneath the other Aircars.

::Obey the Radiant People, and through them, *me!*::

The light of the cube made the interior of the Aircar as light as day, and Sarka was struck at once with another phenomenon. He could see through the sides of the car in any direction.

And what he saw filled him with a sudden fear!

Out of the crater poured myriads of the Gnomes, and up the sides of it came myriads of the gleaming cubes, all racing toward the cars.

::Get back! Get back!:: he commanded the Gnomes and the cubes.

At the same time he issued his commands to the cube within his own car, and to the cubes which by now were inside the other Aircars, realizing that the cubes themselves were the motive power of the Aircars—and that his will was the will of these individual cubes.

::Fly at once! Fly outward at top speed toward the Earth!::

Instantly, as though a single signal had started all the cars, a dozen Aircars rose majestically from the crater, while Sarka studied the Gnomes and the cubes in turmoil on the rim. He noted then, a strange circumstance: that when he commanded the Gnomes and the pursuing cubes to keep back, they hesitated, dazedly, as though they did not know whether to

advance or to retreat; that when he merely watched them, they came on.

He laughed aloud at this measuring of mental swords with Luar, and with Dalis. For he could sense the conflict very plainly. She commanded the Gnomes and the cubes to attack, he commanded them to retreat, and they remained undecided, like people drawn between two extremities, and uncertain which direction to take.

Upward, side by side now, floated the Aircars of the Moon, and in the forepeak of each, one of the gleaming cubes, like—like anti-gravitational ovoids of the Moon! At the fast falling rim of the crater boiled the Gnomes and the cubes, stirring and tumbling, hampered by their very numbers, as they tried to attack at will of Luar and retreated in confusion at the will of Sarka.

Then there was Jaska beside Sarka, her face fearful, as he pointed off across the gloomy expanse of the Moon.

From all sides, from all directions, from other craters which these two had not even seen, came scores and hundreds of the monster cars!

They had beaten Luar and Dalis but for a moment, then! Now, at her command, the countless other Aircars were coming in to head them off, to fight them back to the surface of the Moon. It would be a race against time, and against death. But of at least a dozen of the Aircars, Sarka was master, and he did not fear the issue. That strange exaltation which the white flames had given him filled him with a confidence that nothing could shake.

He shot a thought at the gleaming cube in the forepeak.

::Faster! Faster! There is no limit to your speed!
Faster! Faster! Even faster!::

Instantly the Moon seemed literally to drop away beneath the dozen Aircars which carried the Radiant People, while the Aircars of Luar and of Dalis fell hopelessly behind.

Sure that they would win in this race now, since he was just beginning to realize the vastness of his power—the all-encompassing, all-mastering power of the human mind and will, which the white flames of the Moon had made almost god-like—Sarka turned his eyes toward a coldly gleaming sphere in the star-spangled heavens ahead.

It was the Earth, and it seemed ringed in flames! From its edges there seemed to shoot long streamers of yellow or golden flames, which broke into sunlike pinwheels of radiance at their tips. Something, there on the precious Earth, was decidedly wrong!

Instantly, telepathically, he sought to gain mental contact with his father.

::Father, we are coming!:: he said, across those countless miles. ::What is happening?::

For a full minute there was no answer. Then it came, feeble, broken, weighted with fear; but it was a thought-message, unmistakably, of Sarka the Second.

::Hurry, son! Hurry! For Dalis has indeed betrayed us! I could not maintain control of the Earth with the Beryls, for some strange catastrophe has destroyed all the Beryls in the area Dalis ruled! The shifting of positions of the Earth and the Moon has so altered the relative effects of the pull of gravity exerted by the planets that Mars has been brought into dangerous proximity to us and is already so close that her ether-lights are playing over us! Surely you must be able to see them! We have received messages, but as yet I have only been partially able to decode them! What I have decoded, however, presages catastrophe—for I am sure that Mars and the Moon are in confederation, and that the Moon-people have deliberately forced us into contact with her ally!::

Cold fear clutched at the throat of Sarka as he caught the message. He decided not to tell Jaska for the moment. He looked to right and left, at the Aircars on either side of him, then issued his commands.

::Faster! Faster! Be prepared to land in the area of the Gens of Cleric, as close as possible to my laboratory!::

A strange, awesome sight, that flight of the rebels of Dalis' Gens from the Moon to the Earth—like gleaming stars across the void. Far out in Space they fled at terrific speed through almost utter darkness, but their light was still blinding, lighting the way.

Chapter 19: *Desolation*

Stranger, more thrilling even than had been the flight of the Earth after being forced out of its orbit, was the flight of those dozen Aircars of the Moon, bearing the rebels of Dalis' Gens back to Earth.

Martian fire-balls and the terrific Moon-cubes wreak tremendous destruction on helpless Earth in the final death struggle of the warring worlds.

For the light which glowed from the bodies of the rebels, which had been given them by their passage through the white flames, was transmitted to the cars themselves, so that they glowed as with an inner radiance of their own—like comets flashing across the night.

Strange alchemy, which Sarka wondered about and, wondering, looked ahead to the time when he should be able, within his laboratory, to analyze the force it embodied, and thus gain new scientific knowledge of untold value to people of the Earth.

As the cars raced across outer darkness, moving at top speed, greater than ever attained before by man, greater than even these mighty cars had traveled, Sarka looked ahead, and wondered about the fearful report his father had just given him.

That there was an alliance between Mars and the Moon seemed almost unbelievable. How had they managed the first contact, the first negotiations leading to the compact between two such alien peoples? Had there been any flights exchanged by the two worlds, surely the scientists of Earth would have known about it. But there had not, though there had been times and times when Sarka had peered closely enough at the surface of both the Moon and of Mars to see the activities, or the results of the activities, of the peoples of the two worlds.

Somehow, however, communication, if Sarka the Second had guessed correctly, had been managed between Mars and the Moon; and now that the Earth was a free flying orb the two were in alliance against it, perhaps for the same reason that the Earth had gone a-voyaging.

Side by side sat Sarka and Jaska, their eager eyes peering through the forward end of the flashing Aircar toward the Earth, growing minute by minute larger. They were able, after some hours, to make out the outlines of what had once been continents, to see the shadows in valleys which had once held the oceans of Earth....

And always, as they stared and literally willed the cubes which piloted and were the motive power of the Aircars to speed and more speed, that marvelous display of interplanetary fireworks which had aroused the concern of Sarka the Second.

What were those lights? Whence did they emanate? Sarka the Second had said that they came from Mars, yet Mars was invisible to those in the speeding Aircars, which argued that it was hidden behind the Earth. There was no way of knowing how close it was to the home of these rebels of Dalis' Gens.

And ever, as they flashed forward, Sarka was recalling that vague hint on the lips of Jaska, to the effect that Luar, for all her sovereignty of the Moon, might be,

nonetheless, a native of the Earth. But....

How? Why? When? There were no answers to any of the questions yet. If she were a native of Earth, how had she reached the Moon? When had she been sent there? Who was she? Her name, Luar, was a strange one, and Sarka studied it for many minutes, rolling the odd syllables of it over his tongue, wondering where, on the Earth, he had heard names, or words, similar to it. This produced no result, until he tried substituting various letters; then, again, adding various letters. When he achieved a certain result at last, he gasped, and his brain was a-whirl.

Luar, by the addition of the letter *n*, between the *u* and the *a*, became Lunar, meaning "of the Moon!" Yet Lunar was unmistakably a word derived from the language of the Earth! It was possible, of course, that this was mere coincidence; but, taken in connection with the suspicions of Jaska, and the incontrovertible fact that Luar resembled people of the Earth, Sarka did not believe in this particular whim of coincidence.

Who was Luar?

His mind went back to the clucking sounds which, among the Gnomes of the Moon, passed for speech. He pondered anew. He shaped his lips, as nearly as possible, to make the clucking sounds he had heard, and discovered that it was very difficult to manage the letter *n*!

The conclusion was inescapable: This woman, Luar, had once been *Lunar*, the *n*, down the centuries, being dropped because difficult for the Gnomes to pronounce.

"Yes, Jaska," he said suddenly, "somewhere on Earth, when we reach it, we may discover the secret of Luar—and know far more about Dalis than we have ever known before!"

Jaska merely smiled her inscrutable smile, and did not answer. By intuition, she already knew. Let Sarka arrive at her conclusion by scientific methods if he desired, and she would simply smile anew.

Sarka thought of the manner in which Jaska and he had been transported to the Moon; of how much Dalis

seemed to know of the secrets of the laboratory of the Sarkas. Might he not have known, two centuries ago, of the Secret Exit Dome, and somehow managed to make use of it in some ghastly experiment? And still the one question remained unanswered: Who was Luar?

The Earth was now so close that details were plainly seen. The Himalayas were out of sight, over the Earth, and by a mental command Sarka managed to change slightly the course of the dozen Aircars. By passing over the curve of the Earth at a high altitude, he hoped also to see from above something of the result of the strange aerial bombardment of which his father had spoken.

In their flight, which had been, to them a flight through the glories of a super-heavenly Universe, they had lost all count of time. Neither Sarka nor Jaska, nor yet the people in those other Aircars, could have told how long they had been flying, when, coming over the curve of the Earth, at an elevation of something like three miles, they were able at last to see into the area which had once housed the Gens of

Dalis.

A gasp of horror escaped the lips of Sarka and of Jaska.

The Gens of Dalis had occupied all the territory northward to the Pole, from a line drawn east and west through the southernmost of what had once been the Hawaiian Islands. Upon this area had struck the strange blue light from the deep Cone of the Moon.

Here, however, the light was invisible, and Sarka flew on in fear that somehow his Aircars would blunder into it, and be destroyed—for that the blue light was an agent of ghastly destruction became instantly apparent.

The dwellings of the Gens of Dalis were broken and smashed into chaotic ruins. Over all the area, and even into the area of the Gens southward of that which had been Dalis, the blind gods of destruction had practically made a clean sweep. Sarka had opportunity to thank God that, at the time the blue

column had struck the Earth, it had struck at the spot which had been almost emptied of people, and realized that blind chance had caused it. For, in order for the Gens of Dalis to be in position to launch their attack against the Moon, he had managed, by manipulating the speed of the Beryls, to bring that area into position directly opposite the Moon.

Had it been otherwise, the blue column might have struck anywhere, and wiped out millions of lives!

"God, Jaska," murmured Sarka. "Look!"

Think of a shoreline, once lined with mighty buildings, after the passage of a tidal wave greater than ever before known to man. The devastation would be indescribable. Multiply that shoreline by the vast area which had housed the Gens of Dalis, and the mental picture is almost too big to grasp. Chaos, catastrophe, approaching an infinity of destruction.

The materials of which the vast buildings, set close together, had been made, had been twisted into grotesque, nightmarish shapes, and the whole fused

into a burned and gleaming mass—which covered half of what had once been a mighty ocean—as though a bomb larger and more devastating than ever imagined of man, a bomb large enough to rock the Earth, had landed in the midst of the area once occupied by the Gens of Dalis!

Yet, Sarka knew, remembering the murmuring of the blue column as it came out of the cone, all this devastation had been caused in almost absolute silence. People could have watched and seen these deserted buildings slowly fuse together, run together as molten metal runs together, like the lava from a volcano of long ago under the ponderous moving to and fro of some invisible, juggernautlike agency.

Sarka shuddered, trying to picture in his mind the massing of the minions of Mars, who thus saw a new country given into their hands—if they could take it. Had the Earth been taken by surprise? Had Sarka the Second been able to prepare for the approaching catastrophe?

::Father,:: he sent his thoughts racing on ahead of

him, ::are those lights which are striking the Earth causing any damage?::

::Only,:: came back the instant answer, ::in that they destroy the courage of the people of the Earth! The people, however, now know that Sarka is returning, and their courage rises again! The flames are merely a hint of what faces us; but the people will rise and follow you wherever you lead!::

So, as they raced across the area of devastation, the face of Sarka became calm again. On a chance, he sent a single sentence of strange meaning to his father.

::The ruler of the Moon is a woman called Luar, which seems a contraction of Lunar!::

For many minutes Sarka the Second made no answer. When it came it startled Sarka to the depths of him, despite the fact that he had expected to be startled.

::There was a woman named Lunar!::

Chapter 20: *Sarka Commands Again*

Ahead, through the storms which still hung tenaciously to the roof of the world, flashed those dozen Aircars of the Moon. Now Sarka could plainly see the dome of his laboratory, and from the depths of him welled up that strange glow which Earthlings recognize as the joy of returning home, than which there is none, save the love for a woman, greater.

Now he could see the effect of those flares, or lights, from Mars, which impinged on the face of the Earth, though he could see no purpose in them, no reason for their being, since they seemed to do no damage at all, though the effect of them was weird in the extreme.

Outer darkness, rent with ripping, roaring storms, flurries of ice, snow and sleet, shot through and through by balls of lambent flames in unguessable numbers. Every light which struck the surface of the Earth, bounded away and, half a mile or so from the surface again, burst into flaming pin-wheels, like skyrockets of ancient times. Strange lights, causing

weird effects, but producing no damage at all, save to lessen to some extent the courage of Earthlings, because they did not understand these things. And always, down the ages, man had stood most in fear of the Unknown.

Sarka peered off across the heavens where a ball of flame now seemed to be rising over the horizon, and was amazed at the size of this planet. Mars was close to Earth, so close that, had they possessed Aircars like those of the Moon-people—which remained to be seen—they could easily have attacked the Earth.

Across the face of the Earth flashed those fiery will-o'-the-wisps from Mars, without rhyme or reason; yet Sarka knew positively that they possessed some meaning, and that the Earth had been forced thus close to Mars for a purpose. What that purpose was must yet be discovered.

Then, under the Aircars, the laboratory of Sarka.

Down dropped the Aircars to a landing near the laboratory, and to the cubes in the forepeak of each

Sarka sent the mental command:

::Assure yourselves that the Aircars will remain where they are! Muster inside the laboratory, keeping well away from the Master Beryl!::

Then to the people who had returned, clothed in strange radiance, from the Moon with Sarka and with Jaska he spoke:

::Leave the cars and enter my laboratory, where further orders will be given you!::

With Jaska still by his side, Sarka entered the laboratory through the Exit Dome. Inside, clothing was swiftly brought for the rebels, for Sarka and for Jaska. But, even when they were clothed, these people who had come back seemed to glow with an inner radiance which transfigured them.

Sarka the Second, his face drawn and pale, came from the Observatory to meet his son, and the two were clasped in each other's arms for a moment. Sarka the Second, who had looked no older than his

son, seemed to have aged a dozen centuries in the time Sarka had been gone.

But it was not of the threatened attack by Martians that Sarka the Second spoke. He made no statement. He merely asked a question:

"Was Lunar very beautiful, and just a bit unearthly in appearance?"

Sarka started.

"Yes. Beautiful! Wondrously, fearfully beautiful: but I had the feeling that she had no heart or soul, no conscience: that she was somehow—well, bestial!"

A moan of anguish escaped Sarka the Second.

"Dalis again!" he ejaculated. "But much of the fault was mine! Before you were born, we scientists of Earth had already several times realized the necessity of expansion for the children of Earth if they were to continue. Dalis' proposal to my father was discarded, because it involved the wholesale taking of life. But

after the oceans had been obliterated, and the human family still outgrew its bounds, Dalis came to my father and me with still another proposal. It involved a strange, other-worldly young woman whom he called Lunar! Her family—well, nothing was known about her, for her family could not be traced. Wiped out, I presume, in some inter-family quarrel, leaving her alone. Dalis found her, took an interest in her, and the very strangeness of her gave him his idea, which he brought to my father and me.

"His proposal was somewhat like that which you made when we sent the Earth out of its orbit into outer space, save that Dalis' scheme involved no such program. His was simply a proposal to somehow communicate with the Moon by the use of an interplanetary rocket that should carry a human passenger.

"He put the idea up to this girl, Lunar, and she did not seem to care one way or another. Dalis was all wrapped up in his ideas, and gave the girl the name of Lunar, as being symbolical of his plans for her. He coached and trained her against the consummation of

his plan. We knew something, theoretically at least, about the conditions on the Moon, and everything possible was done for her, to make it feasible for her to exist on the Moon. My error was in ever permitting the experiment to be made, since if I had negated the idea. Dalis would have gone no further!

"But I, too, was curious, and Lunar did not care. Well, the rocket was constructed, and shot outward into space by a series of explosions. No word was ever received from Lunar, though it was known that she landed on the Moon!

"I say no word was ever received, yet what you have intimated proves that Dalis has either been in mental communication with her, hoping to induce her to send a force against the Earth, and assist him in mastering the Earth, overthrowing we Sarkas—or has been biding his time against something of the thing we have now accomplished."

This seemed to clear up many things for Sarka, though it piled higher upon his shoulders the weight of his responsibilities. The other-worldliness of Lunar,

called now Luar, explained her mastery of the Gnomes, and through them the cubes, and her knowledge of the omnipotent qualities of the white flames of the Moon's core, which might have been, it came to Sarka in a flash, the source of all life on the Moon in the beginning!

"But father," went on Sarka, "I don't see any sense in this aerial bombardment by Mars!"

"I believe," said Sarka the Second sadly, "that before another ten hours pass we shall know the worst there is to be known: but now, son, instead of going into attack against the Moon, we go into battle against the combined forces of Mars and of the Moon!"

Sarka now took command of the forces of the Earth. Swiftly he turned to the people of the Gens of Dalis who had come back with him.

"You will be divided into eleven equal groups, as nearly as possible. Father, will you please arrange the division? Each group will be attached to the staff of one of the Spokesman of the Gens, so that each

Spokesman will have the benefit of your knowledge with reference to conditions on the Moon. Each group will re-enter its particular Aircar, retaining control of the cube in each case, of course, and will at once repair to his proper station. Telepathy is the mode of communication with the cubes, and you rule them by your will. Each group, when assembled by my father, will choose a leader before quitting this laboratory, and such leader will remain in command of his group, under the overlordship of the Spokesman to whom he reports with his group. You understand!

"Your loyalty is unquestioned. You will consecrate your lives to the welfare of the Gens to which you are going, since you no longer have a Gens of your own!"

Sarka turned to the cubes, which had formed in a line just inside the Exit Dome, and issued a mental command to the cube that had piloted his Aircar from the Moon. The cube faded out instantly, appearing immediately afterward on the table of the vari-colored lights.

"Father," said Sarka, "while I am issuing orders to the

Spokesmen, please see if you can discover the secret of these cubes: how they are actuated, the real extent of their intelligence! The rest of you, with your cubes, depart immediately and report to your new Gens!"

Within ten minutes the divisions had been made, and the Radiant People had entered the Aircars and, outside the laboratory, risen free of the Earth, and turned, each in its proper direction, for the Gens of its assignment. The Sarkas and Jaska watched them go.

There remained but one Aircar, standing outside on half a dozen of those grim tentacles, with two tentacles swinging free, undulating to and fro like serpents. Harnessed electricity actuating the tentacles—cars and tentacles subservient to the cubes.

The Aircars safely on their way, Sarka stepped to the Master Beryl, tuned it down to normal speed, and signalled the Spokesmen of the Gens.

"The Moon and Mars are in alliance against us, and Dalis has allied himself and his Gens with the ruler of

the Moon! I don't know yet what form the attack will take, but know this: that the safety of the world, of all its people, rests in your hands, and that the war into which we are going is potentially more vast than expected when this venture began, and more devastating than the fight with the Aircars of the Moon! Coming to you, in Aircars which we managed to take from the Moon-people, are such of the people of the Gens of Dalis as were able to return with me. Question them, gather all the information you can about them, and through them keep control of the cubes which pilot the Aircars, for in the cubes, I believe, lies the secret of our possible victory in the fight to come!"

Sarka scarcely knew why he had spoken the last sentence. It was as though something deep within him had risen up, commanded him to speak, and deeper yet, far back in his consciousness, was a mental picture of the devastation he had witnessed on his flight above the area that had once housed the Gens of Dalis.

For in that ghastly area, he believed, was embodied

an idea greater than mere wanton destruction, just as there was an idea back of the fiery lights from Mars greater than mere display. Somehow the two were allied, and Sarka believed that, between the blue column, and the fiery lights from Mars, the fate of the world rested.

He could, he believed, by manipulation of the Beryls that yet remained, maneuver the world away from that blue column—which on the Earth was invisible. But to have done so would have thwarted the very purpose for which this mad voyage had been begun. The world had been started on its mad journey into space for the purpose of attacking and colonizing the Moon and Mars.

The Moon had been colonized by the Gens of Dalis, already in potential revolt against the Earth. Mars was next, and by forcing the Earth into close proximity to Mars the people of the Moon had played into the hands of Earth-people—if the people of Earth were capable of carrying out the program of expansion originally proposed by Sarka!

If they were not ... well, Sarka thought somewhat grimly, the resultant cataclysmic war would at least solve the problem of over-population! Inasmuch as the Earth was already committed to whatever might transpire, Sarka believed he should take a philosophic view of the matter!

Sarka turned to an examination of the Master Beryl, and even as he peered into the depths of it, he thought gratefully how nice it was to be home again, in his own laboratory, upon the world of his nativity. He even found it within his heart to feel somewhat sorry for Dalis, and to feel ashamed that he had, even in his heart, mistreated him.

Then he thought, with a tightening of his jaw muscles, of the casual way in which Dalis had destroyed Sarka the First, of his forcing his people to undergo the terrors of the lake of white flames without telling them the simple secret; of his betrayal of the Earth in his swift alliance with Luar; or Luar herself when, as Lunar, a strange waif of Earth, Dalis had sent her out as the first human passenger aboard a rocket to the Moon. All his pity vanished, though he still believed

he had done right in sparing Dalis' life.

Suddenly there came an ominous humming in the Beryl, and simultaneously signals from the vari-colored lights on the table. Sarka whirled to the lights, noting their color, and mentally repeating the names of the Spokesmen who signalled him.

Even before he gave the signal that placed him in position to converse with them, he noted the strange coincidence. The Spokesmen who desired speech with him were tutelary heads of Gens whose borders touched the devastated area where Dalis had but recently been overlord!

An icy chill caressed his spine as he signalled the Spokesmen to speak.

"Yes, Vardee? Prull? Klaser? Cleric?"

The report of each of them was substantially the same, though couched in different words, words freighted heavily with strange terror.

"The devastated area has suddenly broken into movement! Throughout that portion of it visible from my Gens area, the fused mass of debris is bubbling, fermenting, walking into life! An aura of unearthly menace seems to flow outward from this heaving mass, and the whole is assuming a most peculiar radiance—cold gleaming, like distant starshine!"

"Wait!" replied Sarka swiftly. "Wait until the people I have sent you have arrived! Report to me instantly if the movement of the mass is noticeably augmented, and especially so if it seems to be breaking up, or coagulating into any sort of form whatever!"

Then he dimmed the lights, indicating that for the moment there was nothing more to be said. Just then his father, face very gray and very old, entered the room of the Master Beryl from the laboratory.

"Son!" he said. "The crisis is almost upon us! The Martians are coming!"

Chapter 21: *Cubes of Chaos*

Sarka raced into the Observatory, wondering as he ran how the attack of the Martians would manifest itself; but scarcely prepared for the brilliant display which greeted his gaze. Compared to the oncoming flames from Mars, the preceding display of lights had been as nothing. The whole Heavens between the Earth and Mars seemed alight with an unearthly glare, as though the very heart of the sun had burst and hurled part of its flaming mass outward into space.

On it came with unbelievable speed.

But there was no telling, yet, the form of the things which were coming.

"What are they?" whispered Jaska, standing fearlessly at Sarka's side. "Interplanetary cars? Rockets? Balls of fire? Or beings of Mars?"

"I think," said Sarka, after studying the display for a few minutes, "that they are either rockets or fireballs,

perhaps both together! But the Martians cannot consolidate any position on the Earth without coming to handgrips. Since they must know this, we can expect to see the people of Mars themselves when, or soon after, those balls of fire strike the Earth!"

Sarka raced back to the room of the Master Beryl as a strident humming came through to him.

The Spokesmen of the Gens whose borders touched those of the devastated Dalis area, were reporting again, and their voices were high pitched with fear that threatened to break the bounds of sanity.

"The ferment in the devastated area," was the gist of their report, "is assuming myriads of shapes! The fused mass has broken up into isolated masses, and each mass of itself is assuming one of the many forms!"

"What forms?" snapped Sarka. "Quickly!"

"Cubes! Thousands and millions of cubes, and the cubes themselves are forming into larger cubes, some

square, some rectangular! In the midst of these formations are others, mostly columnar, each column consisting of cubes which have coalesced into the larger form from the same small cubes! The columnar formations are topped by globes which emit an ethereal radiance!"

"Listen!" Sarka's voice was vibrant with excitement. "Spokesmen of the Gens, make sure that every individual member of your Gens is fully equipped with flying clothing including belts and ovoids—prepared for an indefinite stay outside on the roof of the world! Get your people out swiftly, keeping them in formation! Keep about you those people of Dalis whom I sent you, and understand before you break contact with your Beryls, that instructions received from these people come from me! In turn, after you have quitted the hives, anything you wish to say to me you can repeat to any one of the glowing people of Dalis!"

The contacts were broken. Sarka stared into the Beryl, glancing swiftly in all directions, to see whether his orders were obeyed.

Out of the myriads of hives were flying the people of all the Gens of Earth, their vast numbers already darkening the roof of the world. The advance fires from Mars seemed to have no effect on them, which Sarka had expected, since the fires seemed to consume nothing they had touched previously.

By millions the people came forth. People dressed in the clothing of this Gens or that, wearing each the insignia of the house of his Spokesman. A brave show. Sarka could see the faces of many, now in light, now in shadow, as the advance fires of Mars lighted them for a moment in passing, then left them in shadow as the bursting balls of fire faded and died.

Strange, too, that the fireballs made no noise. Noiseless flame which rebounded from the surface of the Earth broke in silence, deluging the heavens with shooting stars of great brilliance. Through its display flew the people of the Gens, mustering in flight above flight, each to his own level, under command of the Spokesmen of the Gens.

"How long, father," queried Sarka, "should it take to

empty the Gens areas?"

"The people of Earth have been waiting for word to go into battle since we first sent the people of Dalis against the Moon-men. They still are ready! The dwellings of our people, *all* of them, can be emptied within an hour!"

"I wonder," mused Sarka, "if that is soon enough!"

Perhaps yes, perhaps no. It would be a race, in any case. Sarka divided his attention between the rapidly changing formations of the Moon-cubes in that devastated area and the onrushing charge of the fire-balls from Mars. All were visible to him through the Master Beryl, and from the Observatory, though the Martian fire-balls were now so close that the vanguard of them could even be seen in the Master Beryl, adjusted to view only activities on the surface of the Earth.

Even as the last flights of the Gens of Earth were slipping into the icy air from the roof of the world, the Moon-cubes began their terrifying, appalling attack,

every detail of which could be seen by Sarka from the Master Beryl.

Those columns, composed of cubes, seemed to be the leaders of a vast cube-army. The top of each of them was a gleaming globe whose eery light played over the country immediately surrounding each column, their weird light reflected in the squares, rectangles and globes that other cubes had formed.

Sarka sought swiftly among the columns for the one which might conceivably be in supreme command; but even as he sought the Moon-cubes moved to the attack. The globes on the tops of the columns dimmed their lights, and the squares, rectangles and globes got instantly into terrible motion.

Southward from the position in which they had formed they began to move, the squares and rectangles apparently sliding along the surface of the scarred and broken soil, the globes rolling.

Southward there was the vast wall of the Gens that bordered the devastated area in that direction, and the

cube-army was instantly at full charge toward this, in what Sarka realized was, to be a war of demolition!

Within a minute, Sarka was conscious of a trembling of all the laboratory, and the eyes of Jaska were wide with fear. Swiftly the trembling grew, until sound now was added to the vast, awesome tremor—a vast, roaring crescendo of sound that mounted and mounted as the speed of the cube-army increased. The vanguard of the cube-army struck the dwelling of the Gens southward of that of Dalis, and a mighty, rocketing roar sounded in the Master Beryl, was audible inside the laboratory, even without the aid of the Beryl, at whose surface Sarka stared as a man fascinated, hypnotized.

The cube-army struck the dwellings, disappeared into them as though they had been composed of tissue paper, and continued on! Over the tops of the cube-army toppled the roofs of the dwellings, there, in the midst of the cubes, to be ground to powder, with a sound as of a million avalanches grinding together in some awesome, sun-size valley. Southward, in the wake of the chaotic charge, moved a mighty, gigantic

crevasse, whose sides were the walls of the hives left standing. And still the cube-army moved in, grinding everything it touched to dust, trampling buildings into nothingness, destroying utterly along a front hundreds of miles wide, and as deep as the dwellings of men!

"God!" cried Sarka, his voice so tense that both his father and Jaska heard it above the roaring which shook and rocked the world. "Do you see? The Moon-cubes are destroying the dwelling of our people, and the Martians are to destroy the people who have fled!"

"There must be a way," said Sarka the Second quietly, "to circumvent the cubes! But what? Your will still rules the cubes which piloted you from the Moon?"

"Yes," replied Sarka tersely, "but there are only a dozen of the cubes. What can they do against countless millions of them? Cubes which are Moon-cubes, brought to the Earth in the heart of that blue column, here reformed to create an army which is invincible, because it cannot be slain! It means that

the Moon-people themselves, thousands of miles out of our reach, have but to sit in comfort and watch their cube-slaves destroy us! When they have laid waste the Earth, the Martians have but to finish the fight!"

"If, beloved," said Jaska, "your will commands those twelve cubes, it can also command all the others, for they must be essentially the same. Call on the rebels of Dalis to help you!"

"Then what of the Spokesmen of the Gens, who will be out of contact with me?"

"They must stand on their own feet, must fight their own battle! Call to you the people who have passed through the white flames, and fight with the distant will of Luar and of Dalis for control of the cube-army!"

Again that exaltation, which convinced him he could move mountains with his two hands, coursed through the being of Sarka.

Quietly he answered Jaska.

"I believe you are right," he said softly. "Those of us who have passed through the flames which bore these Moon-cubes will control the cubes, even bend them to our will. The Spokesmen must vanquish the Martians or perish!"

Then he sent his mental commands to the Spokesmen:

::Meet the Martians when they arrive and destroy or drive them back! You live only if you win! We speak no more until victory is ours! People of the Gens of Dalis, go to the areas being devastated by the cubes, taking your cubes and Aircars with you, and I will join you there! *And Jaska with me!::*

Sarka had not himself mentally spoken the last four words. Jaska had thought-spoken them, before he could prevent. He turned upon her, lips shaping a command that she remain behind. But she forestalled him.

"I, too, have been through the white flames! You may have need of all of us!"

Chapter 22: *The Struggle for Mastery*

The people of all the Gens of Earth were now between two fires. The cube-army, ruled by the mistress of the Moon, was laying waste the dwellings of the Gens, destroying them with a speed and surety of which no earthquake, whatever its proportions, would have been capable. The Gens were forced out upon the roof of the world—where, scarcely had they maneuvered into their prearranged formations, than the Martians struck.

Those huge balls of fire, larger even than the Aircars of the Moon, landed in vast and awe-inspiring numbers on the roof of the world—landed easily, with no apparent effort or shock. The light of them made all the world a place of vast radiance, save only that portion which was being destroyed by the cube-army, and this area had a cold, chill radiance of its own.

By groups and organisations the fire-balls of Mars landed, and rested quiescent on the surface of the globe.

Sarka, pausing only long enough in his laboratory to study this strange attack and to discover how it would get under way, was at the same time preparing to go forth to take his own strange part in the defensive action of Earthlings. A vast confidence was in him....

"We will lose millions of people, father," he said softly. "But it will end in our victory, in the most glorious war ever fought on this Earth!"

"That is true, my son!" replied the older man sadly.

For several minutes the vast fire-balls, which seemed to be monster glowing octagons, rested where they had landed, and even then the Gens of the people were closing on them, bringing their ray directors and atom-disintegrators into action.

Then, when the Earthlings would have destroyed the first of the vast fire-balls—and Sarka was noting that the flames which bathed the balls seemed to have no effect whatever on Earthlings, save to outline them in mantles of fire—the fire-balls wakened to new life.

They opened like the halves of peaches falling apart, and out upon the roof of the world poured the first Martians Earth had ever seen!

They were more than twice the size, on the average, of Earth people, and at first glance seemed to resemble them very much, save that their eyes, of which each Martian was possessed of two, were set on the ends of long tentacles which could stretch forth to a length of two feet or more from the eye-sockets and thus be turned in any direction. Each eye was independent of its neighbor, as one could look forward while the other looked backward, or one could look right while the other looked left.

Each Martian possessed two arms on each side of a huge, powerful torso, and legs that were like the bolls of trees, compared to the slender limbs of Earthlings. All the Martians seemed to be dressed in the skins of strange, vari-colored beasts. Each carried in his upper right hand a slender canelike thing some three feet in length, from whose tip there flashed those spurts of flame which had puzzled the Earth people before the actual launching of the attack.

Beyond these weapons, the Martians seemed to possess no weapons of offense at all, nor of defense.

"With our ray directors and atom-disintegrators," said Sarka, moving into the Exit Dome with Jaska, "we can blast them from the face of the Earth!"

But in a moment he realized that he had spoken too hastily.

The nearest fire-ball was, of course, within the area of the Gens of Cleric, and Sarka could here see with his naked eyes all that transpired. The Martian passengers, who moved swiftly away from their fire-ball vehicles, then a flight of the Gens of Cleric descended upon the fireball and its fleeing passengers, with tiny ray directors and atom-disintegrators held to the fore, ready for action.

The Martians, at some distance from their glowing vehicle, paused and formed a ragged line, facing the ball, staring at the descending people of the Gens of Cleric, their tentaclelike eyes waving to and fro, oddly like the tentacles of those Aircars of the Moon.

The flight was hovering above the first fireball. In a second now, at the command of an underling, the ray directors would destroy fire-ball and Martians as thoroughly as though they had never existed at all.

But then a strange thing happened. At that exact moment, timing their actions to fractions of seconds, the Martians raised and pointed their canelike weapons of the spurting flames. They pointed them, however, not at the Earthlings, but at the fire-ball which had brought them to Earth!

Instantly the fire-ball exploded as with the roaring of a hundred mighty volcanoes—and the descending flight of the Gens of Cleric was blasted into countless fragments! Bits of them flew in all directions. Many dropped, the mangled, infinitesimal remains of them, down to the roof of Earth, while many were hurled skyward through formations above them—while those formations, to a height of a full two miles, were broken asunder. Many flights above that first flight were smashed and broken, their individual members hurled in all directions by that one single blast of a single fire-ball.

Individuals who escaped destruction were hurled end over end, upward through other flights higher above, and the whole aggregation of flights which had been concentrated on that first fire-ball was instantly demoralized, while full fifty per cent of its individuals were instantly torn to bits!

Sarka groaned to the depths of him.

"The leader of the Martians, or the master who sent them here, sent them here to win. For if they do not win, they cannot return to Mars, as they will have destroyed their vehicles! Their confidence is superhuman!"

"Have faith in the courage of Earthlings, son!" said Sarka.

It was much to ask, for if one single one of these fire-balls could wreak such havoc with the people of Earth, what would be the destruction by the countless other unexploded fireballs of the Martians?

Still, the Spokesmen themselves must discover a way

to hold their own, to win against the Martians. For Sarka there was greater work to do. He must oppose the wills of Luar and of Dalis in a mighty mental conflict, which would decide whether the homes of men would be saved, or utterly destroyed by the Moon-cubes.

But as he left through the Exit Dome, with Jaska by his side, he shuddered, and was just a little sick inside as he saw the fearful result of that first explosion of a Martian fire-ball! Bits of human wreckage were scattered over the Earth for a great distance in all directions from where the fire-ball had exploded. And at that spot a gigantic crater had been torn in the roof of the world, going down to none knew what depths.

Even the Martians, here only to consolidate positions which had passed the demolition of the Moon-cubes, were capable of demolitions almost as ghastly and complete as those of the cubes!

The sound was incapable of being described, for outside the laboratory the sound of the advance of the Moon-cubes eating into the dwellings of men,

tumbling them down, grinding them to powder, was cataclysmic in its mighty volume. A million express trains crashing head-on into walls of galvanized iron at top speed, simultaneously.

Ear-drum crashing blows as fireballs exploded. The screams and shrieks of maimed and dying Earthlings—of Earthlings unwounded but possessed of abysmal fear....

Then, resolutely, Sarka turned his back on the conflict between the Martians and the people of Earth, and hurtled across the devastated roof of the world toward that area which was feeling the destructive force of the vandal cube-army. As he flew, Jaska keeping pace with him in silence, his mind was busy.

Passage through the white flames of the Moon had given him the key. Those white flames—source of all life on the Moon—rendered almost godlike those whom it bathed ... gave them unbelievable access of mental brilliance ... were the source of that blue column which had forced the Earth outward toward Mars ... were the source, in some way, of the cubes

themselves, as he and Jaska, after passing through them, owed their now near-divinity to the same white flames! Those flames had made Luar mistress of the Moon—therefore of the Gnomes and of the cubes! Therefore, Sarka, having been bathed in the flames, should make himself master of the cubes, if he could out-will the combined determinations of Luar and of Dalis!

His confidence was supreme as he fled through outer darkness toward the eery light which came from the area of demolitions. Looking ahead, he could see tiny glows in the sky, which he knew to be the rebels of Dalis' Gens, flying to keep their rendezvous with him.

Higher mounted his courage and his confidence as he approached the roaring crash, perpetual and always mounting, which showed him where the cube-army was busiest. The sound vibrated the very air, causing the bodies of Sarka to tingle with it, causing them to flutter and shake in their flight with its awesome power. But they did not hold back, flew onward through the gloom, leaving behind them the brightly lighted areas where Gens of Earth battled with the

fireballs of the Martians, moving into the area of the eery glowing of the cubes.

Just as he approached the spot where mighty dwellings were tumbling before the march of the cube-army, he sent a single command toward the cube which had piloted him from the Moon.

::Come to me on the edge of the crevasse nearest the place of most destruction!::

Would the cube now be subservient to his will? He wondered. Everything depended upon that. If not, then he might as well try to stay the forces of a mighty avalanche with his breath, as halt the cube-army with his will.

But strangely enough, the closer he came to the vast area of tumbling dwellings the calmer he became, the more sure that he would win against the cubes.

For when he landed at the lip of the crevasse, across which he could look for a hundred miles, a single cube gleamed brightly almost at his feet, awaiting his

orders!

One by one, by twos, threes, fours, dozens, came the glowing people who had been bathed in the white flames of the Moon's life-source, and as each dropped down beside him, Sarka gave a command.

"Drop down in the midst of the cubes! Make your own cube the rallying point for this vast army of cubes, force the cubes to desist in their mighty destruction, be subservient to your will—and do you, each of you, be subservient to *my* will!"

Away dropped the rebels, glowing points of white flame, dropping down the sides of the crevasse, a mighty, awesome canyon, into the very heart of the activity of the cubes, and from the brain of Sarka, aided by the will of Jaska, went forth a simple command:

::Cease your march of destruction, O Moon-cubes, and harken to the will of Sarka, your master! Draw back from your labors, and muster, not as squares, rectangles and columns, but as individual cubes, in

the area already devastated by you! Rally about the glowing people who have passed through the flames which were your Moon-mother, and wait for orders! Take no further heed of commands from Dalis and Luar!::

Instantly it seemed to Sarka that he had drawn into some invisible vortex which tore at his brain, at his body, at his soul. Inside him a cold voice seemed to say:

::Fool, Sarka! My will is greater than yours!::

But though the force of the will of Luar, whose thought he recognized, tore at him, almost shriveled the soul and brain of him with its might, he continued to send his thought-command out to the Moon-cubes, forcing it through the wall of Luar's will, hurling it like invisible projectiles at the cube-army below.

Exultation possessed him, buoyed him up, gave him greater courage and confidence as the moments passed for even as all his being concentrated on the will-command to the cubes, his senses told him that

the mighty sound of destruction was dying away, fading out.

Slower now the dwellings fell, slower moved the Moon-cubes; and as they slowed in their mighty march through the dwellings of men, so increased the confidence, the power of will, of Sarka and his people—the rebels of the Gens of Dalis.

Then, after an hour, whose mighty mental conflict had bathed Sarka in the perspiration of superhuman effort, the sound of destruction ceased all together, and the dwellings ceased to fall.

A silent shout, like an inborn paean of rejoicing, surged through Sarka as he noted the retreat from the dwellings of men, of the Moon-cubes! Back and back retreated the squares and the rectangles, the columns and the globes, breaking apart as they retreated.

Within fifteen minutes after the destruction had ceased, millions of gleaming cubes winked upward from the bottom of the crevasse—motionless,

quiescent!

Sarka sent forth another thought.

::I am your master, O cubes of the Moon!::

No sound, no movement, answered him.

::Luar and Dalis are no longer able to command you!::

Still no sound or movement of the cubes.

Then, taking a deep breath, as of a swimmer preparing to dive into icy water, Sarka gave a new command.

::Dissolve! Reform on the roof of the world in globes! Roll over the face of the Earth, destroy the fire-balls of Mars—and take prisoners, inside the globes, the attackers from Mars!::

Instantly the gleaming cubes vanished, and darkness as of a mighty pit possessed the crevasse of destruction. Then, at the lip of the great crevasse, the

cubes swept into form—myriads of globes which gleamed with the cold blue brilliance of the Moon!

They had no sooner formed as globes than they were in action again, rolling over the roof of the world as with a rising crescendo of thunder tumbling down the night-black sky. So mighty was their rush that the roof of the world trembled and shook.

Above their charge raced Sarka and Jaska, and with them the rebels of the Gens of Dalis.

All were present when the cubes crashed into the fire-balls from Mars, swept the Martians within themselves as prisoners, held them securely—and continued on, destroying the fire-balls in myriads. Here and there fire-balls exploded on contact, destroying the globes, which immediately reformed again, as though the explosions had not been felt at all.

Sarka had won the allegiance of the Moon-cubes, which had defeated and taken prisoners the Martians, destroying the vehicles in which they might have

returned to Mars. And as realization came, darkness settled over the roof of the world; the last flare of Mars faded and died.

This done, the cubes formed in mighty rows, facing the laboratory of Sarka. His heart beating madly with exultation, Sarka studied them. Then he stepped into the Observatory, gazed away across the space which separated the Earth from the Moon, sent a mental message winging outward.

::Luar! Dalis!::

Faintly, fearfully, came the answer.

::We hear, O Sarka!::

::Shift the blue column away from the Earth! Do not interfere as we return to our orbit about the sun! Obey, or I combine the total knowledge of Mars, the Earth, and the Moon in an attack against you and your Martian ally! Inform your ally that their people will not return, that the Earth has need of them—but that two Gens of Earth will be received by Martians in

perfect amity, and these Gens allowed bidding places on Mars! Unless your ally obeys, the Martians in my hands will be destroyed!::

In an hour the answer came, the snarling thought-answer of Dalis.

::We hear! We obey! But Dalis is never beaten while he lives! His day will come!::

Sarka found himself feeling even a little sorry for sorely beaten Dalis; but his face was grim as he sent another command to the people of Dalis who had passed through the life-source of the Moon.

::Take command of the cubes, and force them to repair the damage which has been done to the dwellings of men—to repair them completely, over all the face of the Earth!::

As the glowing people hurried to obey, Sarka softly asked his father:

"But what shall we do with the Martians?"

Sarka the Second smiled.

"Release them and send them to the lowest level where, guarded by the cubes, they will be set to constructing fireballs like those in which they arrived for the use of Earth if Dalis, or the Martians, ever attack again! And, son...."

"Yes, O my father?" said Sarka softly.

"I have another suggestion for the employment of the cubes! Let them build Aircars to be used by the Gens of Prull and of Klaser, as transportation to Mars whenever you are ready for them to go!"

Sarka smiled boyishly, happily.

"Yes, O my father; and is there anything else?"

"Yes! Take Jaska as your mate! Do you not see that she is waiting for you to speak?"

Sarka turned to Jaska, whose face was glorious in her surrender, and whose lips were parted in a loving

smile—which faded only when Sarka's lips caressed it away.